The Paris Review

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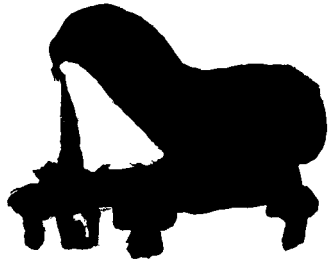

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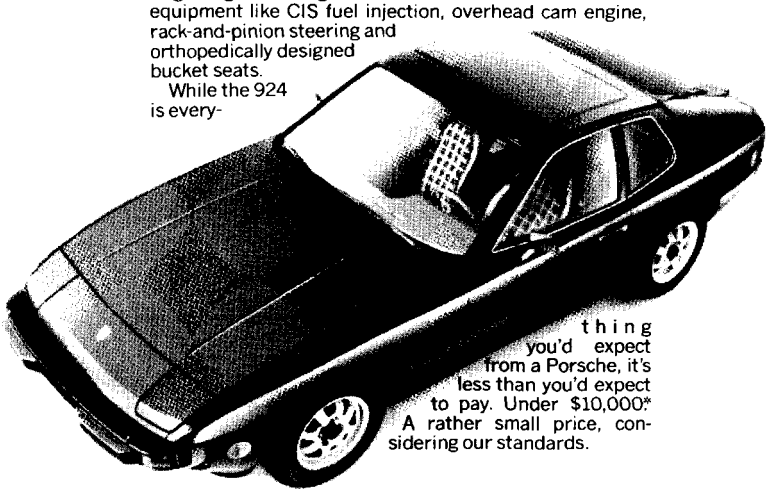

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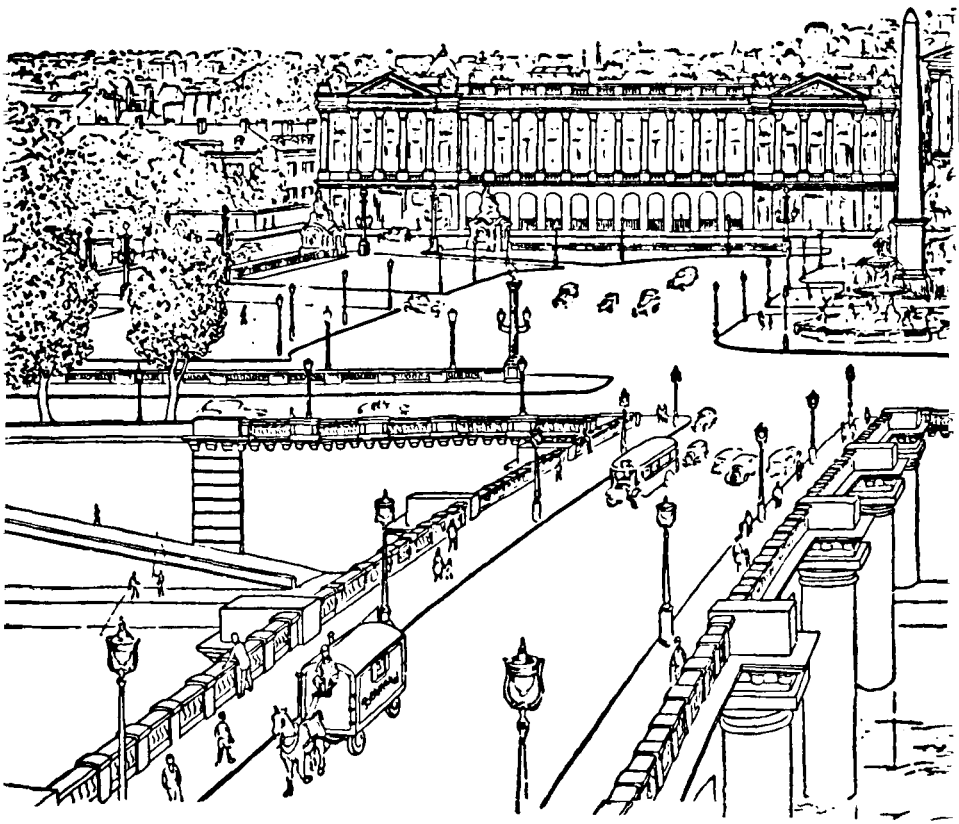

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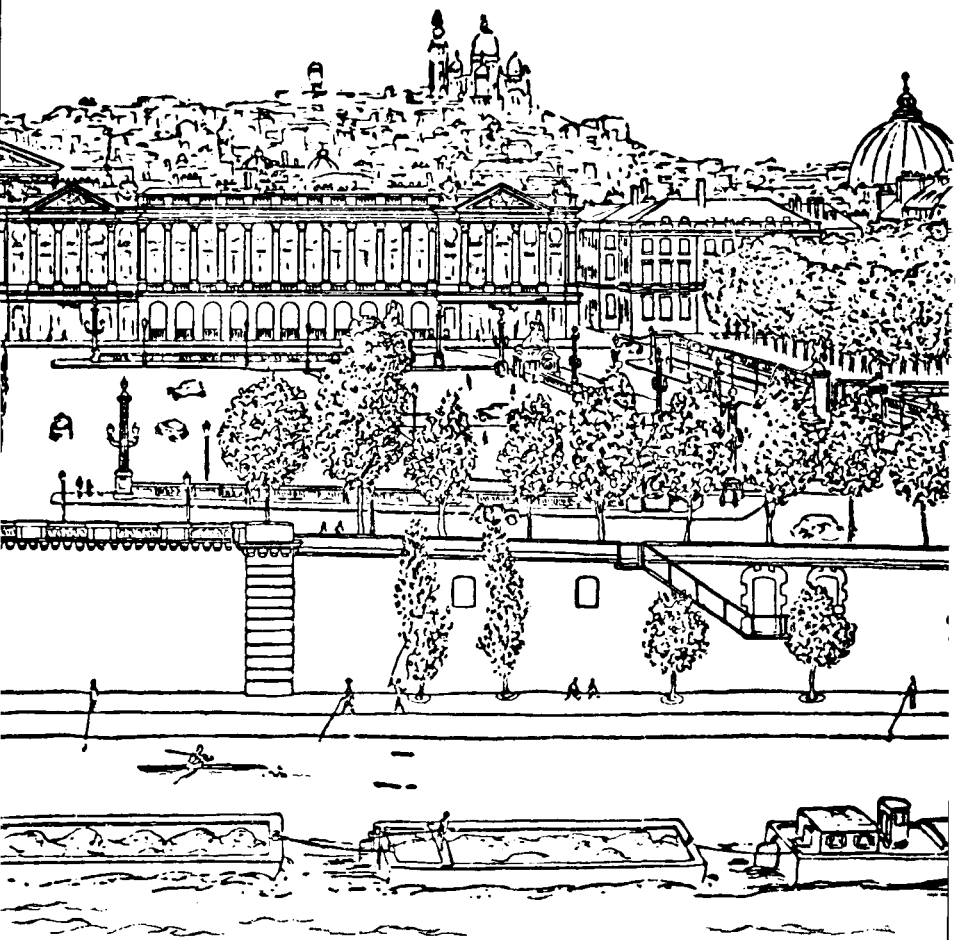

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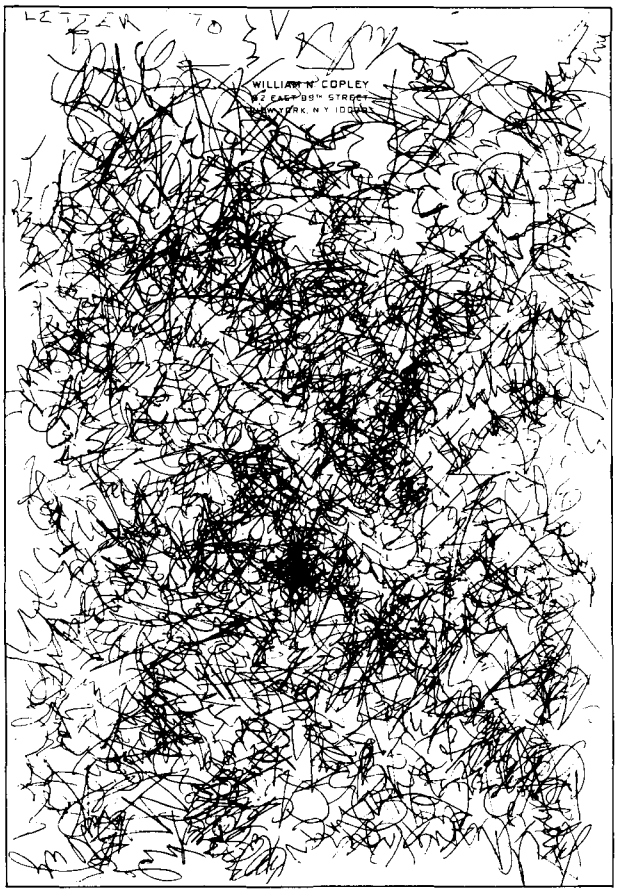

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Horst Wessel

C.W. Gusewelle

I am not a lucky traveler. Business has taken me often to the far parts of the world and on these journeys I have made it unhappy practice to fall ill in the place I am visiting. This time it is nothing more sensational than an infected tooth, and in so prosaic a place as Bad Godesberg. Tomorrow I will need to find a dentist and have the tooth looked at and treated —or more likely taken out. Which is a nuisance, because it will surely set back my entire schedule of appointments by a full day.

But if sickness is never convenient, other times the infirmities have at least been more interesting--not only clinically, in themselves, but for what they have allowed me to learn *en passant* about the nature of those societies in which I have been stricken.

Once among some Berber people at an oasis south of the Atlas Mountains in the Sahara a kidney ailment felled me suddenly, terrifyingly. I was in indescribable pain, but by the greatest luck there was a doctor in the place, a Dutchman.

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The people brought him to me and he injected me with two syringes of morphine—the maximum sublethal dose.

More than a day later I awoke in a ward of a little desert infirmary where I had been taken—formerly a French colonial clinic, staffed now by the Dutchman and several half-trained Moroccan assistants.

There were on the steel cots in that room, besides myself, seven young Berber men, all sufferers of trachoma, a fly-borne disease of the eyes which is common to the region and very often blinding. The method of treatment there—and for all I know everywhere—required that the eyes be kept continually open. At the desert infirmary that was accomplished by passing a thread through each eyelid, then rolling back the lids and taping the ends of the taut threads to the upper forehead. Waking there, floating up like a drowned swimmer from the depths of the morphine stupor and seeing my roomfellows asleep—the seven of them with lids open and eyes rolled up whitely in their sockets—and finding moreover that my own pain was entirely gone, for some time I believed that I was in a morgue.

In fact the crisis had passed. Presently the Berber boys woke and as my head cleared we talked, in my pidgin French and theirs. That happened to be the day of the first rain in that place in two years. We stood at the windows, all of us invalids together, and watched it fall for perhaps thirty minutes. Outside no one took cover. The people stood fully in the open, looking up, becoming wonderfully wet in the sharp winter morning of the desert. And then the sooty little cloud passed northward, dragging its skirts up the flank of the high Atlas, and the rain stopped for another year or two.

The treatment of trachoma requires time. Just how much I didn't ask, but some weeks at least. My wardmates said that it was possible, surprisingly soon, to become used to sleeping with the eyes open and that at any rate it was easier than going blind.

The Dutch doctor I never saw again, but his Moroccan aides were wonderfully considerate and kind. They discharged me

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late that same day, still a bit trembly in the knees but otherwise recovered. In the only store in the village I found some Swiss chocolate bars and took them back that evening and passed them through the window to my colleagues in the ward.

That morning's shower, where it had crested the barrier range, had become briefly a real storm. We looked at the African moon on the new snow mantle of the mountains and ate chocolate and discussed whether the high pass would be open so that I could get out to the north by hired car. Then we shook hands under the raised screen of the window and I went on about my life and they remained there in theirs.

And you can see, had it not been for the sickness, all of that I would have missed.

That adventure is one among many. There have been formidable dysenteries: from a plate of raw shellfish in Venice in a more trusting time; from a sugar bun bought, in deliberate madness, from a vendor in Oaxaca; from the mayonnaise on the Salad *National* in the street cafe of the hotel of that name in Moscow.

Now certainly the pain of a tooth is not to be compared to the episode with the kidney. Nor is it as degrading as an ungovernable bowel. Still, in this moment, it is unpleasant enough. The tooth is the farthest one back on the right side. The least pressure sets it aflame. To chew on it is unimaginable. Today is Thursday. In the four days from Monday morning in Cracow until arriving on this afternoon's plane, I have eaten, in total, one bowl of beetroot soup and three dishes of ice cream.

Because the wisdom tooth and the molar next to it on that side already have been lost, the tooth in question is of functional importance. I would have liked to save it if at all possible and have eaten aspirin and waited for it to subside. That has happened in the past a time or two. Yesterday, however, a great knot rose up beside the tooth on the inner gum. As I

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touch that now lightly with the side of my tongue it seems immense. The swelling has even spread to the soft tissue beneath the tongue itself, so that to speak or even to swallow is unpleasant. Not agonizing, but distinctly uncomfortable.

This development I will admit has a bit alarmed me. I recall stories—or seem to—of the poison from abscessed teeth going directly to the brain. Or possibly it was to the heart. In any case, of people being overwhelmed by massive corruption. My Polish friends advised, since it was only a further wait of a day, having it looked after in Germany.

This afternoon I fell asleep on the plane to Frankfurt and dreamed first that the rot had spread to the tooth next to the hurting one, so that it had to be removed, too. Then it was decided that the matter had been so long neglected it would be necessary to take the whole side of the jaw. The dentists—for in my dream there were armies of them—said that they could rebuild the jaw with bones from my foot, but that the foot would have to be sacrificed. I could choose: a plastic foot or half a face.

I flung myself back and away from them and struck the swollen side of my face against the airplane window and awoke with a scream. The stewardess came and I took a complimentary double whiskey. So this is the illness of this trip; always there is something. The point, then, is to see what can be learned from it.

This hotel is the one in which I always stay. There are other, more elegant ones here, but this one is pleasant and I am used to it. The concierge is very sympathetic. By the time I arrived the dentists all had left their offices, so he will ring one the first thing in the morning. Meantime I have eaten another six aspirin and will hope that on waking the problem will have disappeared. Unlikely, but possible of course. My room faces out on the small park with its ancient trees and, on the far side, a tennis club. It is very deep twilight now, and still the figures of the tennis players in white can be seen gliding soundlessly in the distance. They will hit the ball as long as it can be seen, or after.

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Sleep is out of the question.

There is a drinking hall that fronts on the street below the hotel, just under my window. The constant roar of shouting and singing is unbelievable. I telephoned the night man on the hotel desk but he said that there was no help for the noise in such weather. It is uncommonly hot for the season and the windows of the stube must be kept open. Doors, too.

Mine is a corner room, so I have tried shutting the street window and opening the one over the alley to the rear. But there are some men down there—Greeks or Yugoslavs or Turks of some sort—sitting among the cans and beating out rhythms on wooden sticks. The rattle of that penetrates directly to my tooth. Even the din from the drinking hall is preferable.

One time in Leopoldville when it was still the Congo I came down with malaria and was immediately put out of my hotel room for no better reason than that the bastard of a manager —a Belgian—knew how desperately I needed it. Another bed wasn't to be had anywhere in that wretched town, so I sat burning and chattering by turns, through all of two nights and part of a second day, at a table in a street cafe, my bags beside me, a figure of pity and curiosity, watching the sun wheel across and the heat lightning rise north of the Stanley Pool at evening and seeing men carry up butchered pieces of crocodile through the mist from the river at first light and skinned monkeys hung by their wrists from sticks for the market. Until a plane delivered me out of there to Nyasaland.

In bad times it is always reassuring to remember worse.

A sudden cool breath of wind just came through the window. Maybe the weather will change. Below, young men come out of the drinking hall and go lurching across the street, arms flung around each others' shoulders, trumpeting like bulls. They have no regard for the traffic, which is mostly trucks at this hour. The trucks come up soundlessly, Mercedes-Benz trucks—tires just hissing on the pavement—forty miles an hour at a minimum. Trucks and men on foot pay absolutely no attention to one another. The men start into the street. The truck goes past with a rush of wind. The men are

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gone. Not mashed on the street, just *vanished.* How many such miracles can there be? I cannot watch any longer.

The wind comes more strongly now. There is rain in it. I think I hear the banging of windows being closed, the slamming of doors. I know they must still be singing fiercely below, but I cannot hear it. The Turks have gone in from the alley.

The pain seems less. I can let my mouth close until the teeth touch without crying aloud. But the protuberance beside my tongue, the pocket of infection, is enormously larger, so I know there has been no improvement.

This morning the concierge found that his own dentist was in Switzerland on holiday. The dentist of the dining room manager was, himself, ill. But the concierge assured me there were many others in the town, and he consulted the directory. I was sent finally to an office over a wine and spirits shop, just on the Theaterplatz behind the hotel. The dentist was large and pink, like a grocer, and he ran a pink finger slyly back beside my tongue, investigating the great lump.

A woman assistant appeared. He took a scalpel from her and tried to open the abscess. He jiggled his wrist in fine little aiming motions, like someone about to throw a dart. Then jumped forward—and recoiled just as quickly with a sad cry, face pinched up in anger and regret.

"The incision is not satisfactory," the assistant explained. "The swelling is too hard. So Herr Doktor will rub a substance on it and perhaps in the afternoon, when you come again at thirteen o'clock, it will have softened."

The dentist took down a drill and without anesthesia, with hot bone smoke rising, drilled out entirely a filling on the top of the tooth. I screamed and tried to bite his hand. He clucked reproachfully, but the drill stopped. He gave me a pat of reassurance and selected an instrument with a delicate wire hook on its end and probed inside the tooth until he found the nerve. Then, quite deliberately, he took up the nerve on

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the point of the hook and tugged at it, lifted, so that I was in fact levitated from the chair and hung writhing like a worm on the hook point.

There was a milk glass light fixture on the ceiling, filled with the brown shapes of dead millers. How they got inside the globe was a mystery that I tried to solve while hanging there on the hook point. Then he let go of the nerve and I dropped a long distance back into the chair.

There is an American military hospital at Wiesbaden two hours or less from here by electric train. I remembered that there was a morning express, so I ran out of the Theaterplatz and across the street, only just being missed by a truck, then the four blocks to the station. I have not run so fast in years. A train was leaving, its last coach just bending out of view. I asked, and it was the train to Wiesbaden.

I sat for a while on a bench on the station platform, watching other trains arrive and leave. The through freights came flashing past, a blur of metal and sucking wind, the face of the driver up behind his window an iron mask, just as he would surely look to someone on the track.

On the opposite platform was an interesting group. Some young people in their twenties, away early for a weekend of climbing or hiking. There were maybe a dozen of them, lean boys and square-shouldered girls, in lederhosen or bluejeans, all with rucksacks. And others: a young couple holding hands; a father alone with an infant in a carriage; a student late to his studies; an old man sitting bolt erect, both palms resting on the silver handle of a cane standing vertical before him. All these in tableau, like sparrows on a wire.

I noticed then a fine cinematic effect. The liquid voice on the platform speaker would announce the scheduled arrival, and on the very instant—as the minute hand of the clock made its final quick advance—the train would slide in and stop, somehow impatient in repose, a band march playing from the open windows of the coaches. Only a moment it would hesitate, then it was gone—and in its going was like a curtain drawn back to reveal a whole new set of people: a

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long-haired youth in sunglasses; two somber Chinese; an unkempt laborer, some Balkan type; an old couple with matching umbrellas. All already frozen in position as if they had been there forever.

It was wonderful, almost magical, the way the curtain of the train endlessly closed and opened to change the players. I sat for some minutes watching that. The group of young hikers still was on the platform, talking, laughing. An old man listening at one side intruded finally to say something that must have been purposely or accidentally funny because the young people erupted in whoops of joy. And encouraged by that inclusion he offered more, talked louder, forced himself upon them. Until finally, incredibly, he was doing little jumps—waving his cane, jumping straight up stiff-legged off the ground and making quarter-turns in the air.

The young people had lost interest, were not even looking any more. They were talking about something among themselves and had forgotten him quite completely. *Jump, turn.* He abased himself a while longer, and finally crept off ducking and swaying with humiliation. Then a train came and took them all away.

The lump is by now even larger. It is like a turnip filling the lower right side of my mouth. Swallowing is harder as well, even the swallowing of spit. The danger of suffocation briefly occurred to me.

I have just come from the tennis club in the park. There are seats for the public outside the screens, in the shade of the old trees. One player interested me especially. He was a youth of twenty or perhaps a little more with a long, misshapen sickle of a jaw, a helmet of yellow hair and a gangling, bowlegged, hollow-chested child's body—except that he was easily six and a half feet tall. What struck me was the combined impression he conveyed of stupidity and ferocious power.

Last week, from Cracow, I took the excursion to Auschwitz. In the museum of the place there are pictures, made by some of the few who survived, showing scenes of daily life in the

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camp. The great dumb blond child on the tennis court reminded me of the S.S. warders in those paintings. The racquet was a toy in his fist. He was not particularly skilled, but when it happened that he did hit the ball fairly it was *always* unplayable. When he blundered, which was often, he stomped about the court in an elaborate public show of rage. Once, after some glaring stroke of ineptitude, he flung his racquet with such force that it stuck handle-first so high in the fence around the court that a ladder had to be brought from the club house to get it down. And in the end, after all of this, the blond brute won his match easily from a more practiced but smaller, older and thoroughly frightened opponent.

There is nothing to do now except lie here in the room until the hour of thirteen, which is of course 1 p.m. Watching the tennis took my mind briefly off of my predicament. But it is hot again today and because it has become all but impossible even to drink a glass of water the possibility of dehydration must be considered. So I have come indoors to conserve my fluids. These are the last six aspirin in the bottle. I can't for the life of me imagine why the son of a bitch had to drill the filling out of the tooth.

I have given the concierge a list of names and telephone numbers so that he may reschedule my appointments for Monday, with apologies.

The damned tooth is now broken off a fraction above the gum. Not broken cleanly—shattered off. It was with my consent, so I am the fool to blame.

The old dentist was very positive that the thing could not be saved, and I have passed nearly beyond caring. Just to be rid of it is now my main hope. But I am *half* rid of it instead. And I must be careful how I place my tongue. The stump is like broken glass.

He tried to take the tooth, but it was lodged there some way and he hadn't the strength. So the girl added her weight to his. Finally they called the man from the store below, to hold my head and shoulders back against the chair. And it

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was with the three of them working that it happened. I was looking at the millers in the milk glass ceiling globe when there was such a great resonant *whonnnnng* of a sound that I thought something had struck the building. I looked down from the light globe and fixed a picture, like a photograph—first of the storekeeper, his face inverted above me, mouth open empathetically, then of the doctor and his aide frozen together in midfall, the glass-topped cabinet also falling, the dozens of little implements caught motionless in flight.

My next memory is of being alone in the room some time later. How much later I can't say. For a giddy moment I thought the tooth was gone, for I felt the vacancy plainly. But then I felt also the broken remnant and, with my forefinger, found that the tooth missing was the one *forward* of the diseased one. I sprang up with a cry and, hearing me, the assistant came and drew a crude picture on a scrap of paper, giving me to understand that the root of the abscessed tooth had been hooked under the sound one, so that there was no choice but to remove the impediment. The way was now clear, she said, to complete the extraction. But first the doctor instructed that I go to the hotel and regain my strength and return still again in the evening, when it was cooler. I don't know what the temperature has to do with it. Or, for that matter, what I am to need my strength for. That has an unsettling sound to it.

Outside it occurred to me to hail a taxi and ask advice at the embassy. Even in such a simple thing as the cab I had difficulty making myself understood. And it was no use anyway. The embassy had closed early because of a terrorist threat. Volkpolice had cordoned off the compound. I waved my passport and shouted mushy sounds at them through the taxi window, but the blond corporal just spoke to the driver who backed and turned the Mercedes and took me straight to the hotel.

Here I am, then, and without aspirin the pain is nearly unbearable. One would have thought it might reach a level beyond which there was no increase.

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Alternately I lie here on the bed and sit in my chair beside the window. Only a few moments ago, while sitting, I saw three men and two girls come out of the beer stube directly into the path of a silver and purple tandem truck. The truck did not stop or even slow. Other people came out of the drinking hall and stood looking down at the corpses. I wanted to see the conclusion of it, but my pain made me light-headed and I had to come to the bed. Someone must have collected the bodies because the racket of singing has begun again below.

This last was worst. Still the stub of the tooth will not yield. He has given up pulling it out. He tried with a chisel and then a saw—a little whirring circular blade for cutting bone. The saw caught once and leaped to the side and bit into my tongue. There was no pain. My tongue has almost no feeling now. But there was very much blood. So he took a penlike electrical instrument with a glowing white-orange filament to cauterize the wound.

His window looked down on the Theaterplatz, and during all of this a bus arrived and a great many people got out and set up a portable stage with tent. A crowd began to gather, pulling up benches and shoving for seats.

The old man's hand shook as he started to cauterize. He held his wrist with the other hand to steady it, but both shook the same. The tool rattled against my teeth. He burned my mouth terribly, and seeing that he began to cry and left the instrument smoking in my mouth and turned away in regret.

I took the thing out of my mouth and got out of the chair and with great clarity of mind looked through his cabinet until I found surgical gauze, which I tore off the roll and wadded in my shattered mouth. Then I went to stand at the window while he composed himself.

On the far side of the Theaterplatz people were sitting at cafe tables eating ice cream and drinking expresso. The ones

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from the bus unfurled a Star of David flag and erected a placard that read, "Israel, 28 Years of Independence." Then they began to dance, all of the young Jews looking like Arabs. The Germans were clapping and stamping their feet to the music. A stone flew out of the crowd and I cried a warning, which came out only a weak grunt against the glass. The stone was a flower, snatched up quickly with a blown kiss. Then another blossom came flying and one of the dancers dropped without a twitch.

The old man, having dried his eyes, brought soap and towels for us both. The soap had a greasiness and an odd smell, the towel a hairy feel. We stood looking out silently together. Tomorrow, sometime, I will go back to him. I understand that. So does he. We both have invested much and there is a kind of communion between us.

Walking to the hotel I saw my face reflected in a shop window and it is most arresting. Hugely distorted, discolored, the mouth cracked and blistered. The swelling is like a goiter, now, filling the entire space between ear and shoulder. It is fearful to look at and the concierge, when I entered, leaped up in astonishment. I tried to communicate to him my full resignation, but he turned immediately away and pretended not to understand.

Now I am in my room, my head swaddled in the dripping folds of a cool towel. A few minutes ago I went down to the drinking hall to ask—just politely to *ask*—if perhaps they could temper their racket, and they beat me. The Jews are still dancing in the Theaterplatz. Actually their music with the beer songs from the stube make a not unpleasing combination.

The Turks in the alley have stacked boxes on which they can stand to look in at my incredible face. Across the way, in the darkening park, there is some terrible commotion. With a snapping of branches and eruption of shredded leaves a tennis racquet comes exploding up through the trees—and I know that it is only the young *stürmer* late at his play.

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Two Poems by Erica Funkhouser

The Blue in Beets

The blue in beets
comes and goes
sometimes a shadow
of the weeds
where beets grew
or of their towering leaves
other times a suggestion
of what the beets
might have been:
blue birds
blue stones
blue fish
blue whales
blue water.
If blue isn't here
it's there
if it's not there
it's coming
if you have just seen it
it will be back
if you have never seen it
you will.

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Fishing for Flounder

Whether or not flounder prowl
the floor of Blue Hill Bay
we do not know for sure,
but we lower our knobs of salted pork
on fishhooks as if to ask.

Is it these rocks over which
their flat white stomachs,
like the hands of the blind,
brush in search of sustenance,
trusting the topography
to take them
where delicious crab crawl?

Is it here their ocean-purple eyes
gaze at the world up as down,
studying its inversions in depth?

We think the flounder must possess
some horizontal wisdom—
the stability of those who never leap,
who stick to the bottom
of life's deep pools.
A bit dull, perhaps,
with their detailed knowledge
of the few bleak centimeters
beneath their gills,
but extraordinarily informed
about the dark motions
whose polished surface
is all we see.

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Dick Allen

Variation on a Theme by Ernest Hemingway

In a city where I once lived, for many years
an old man sat on his doorstep, in his hand
a brown facecloth, which he turned
over and over, smoothed out
against his knee, crumpled up, smoothed again,
then held at arm's length. Sometimes he buried
his whole face in it, and since he was dressed in tweeds
I could never decide
if he was Idiot or on his way to being wise,
or on his way back, the cloth
his rhodora. I never
asked; he never looked up
from his studies or madness, whichever
let him sit there every sunny day
thinking or not thinking. I never heard
anyone call him in; I never passed
his doorstep as he came out into the morning
or saw him sip from a glass, or even stand.

Like the streets and the marvelous pennies on sidewalks,
the iris that came out of nowhere,
he was a part of my days for awhile and I trusted
him as only a question can be trusted,
never an answer
and I moved away from that city, never regretting
my silence or his
but missing the houses with the mansard roofs
and the tall brick chimneys, so red
against the snow falling, winters I lived there.

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Patricia Goedicke

Knock On Any Door

Knock on any door
For any real reason,

Asking for money, say,
The true test of a heart

Or with blood dripping, or with tears
Or saliva dried in your throat,

Instead of welcome the house will collapse
In a puff of smoke

For if you thought something dependable was in there
You were mistaken, you see

Now that the stone gods
And those who live in the trees, in the stars

Have taken their toys, and left us, or we have left them
And gone somewhere else to play

Even your childhood home is a sandwich board,
The two walls hang from your shoulders

Or maybe you have a lover or a family
And then possibly, for awhile

The house has four walls
Perhaps it is even warm inside

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With kisses and good bread
And a little friendly conversation

But outside, everywhere, all over
Every nook and cranny

Is covered with ramshackle houses,
Dilapidated palaces and shanties

Like mushrooms on a rubbish heap
Millions and millions of card houses

Spring up overnight
On the threadbare carpet of the world:

Kings, Queens, Knaves
Diamonds and Dear Hearts

Day after day after day
At the slightest breath of wind in the sky you can see them

Dipping and turning and falling like lost kites
Blowing away.

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Two Poems by John Pijewski

Our Father

Before he died our father asked to be left
on the dining room table. It was difficult,
but we've learned to eat our meals around him,
though at times someone
still puts a fork into his leg.

Our guests become uncomfortable
when they see him on the table.
They ask if he's asleep.
I always say yes, and that's why they talk
in a whisper for the rest of the night.

Although he no longer brings a paycheck home
he provides for us in small ways.
We dust him daily; change his clothes weekly.
He no longer shouts, stalks the house in
longjohns, or comes home drunk Friday night.

We put a flower in his lapel every Sunday.
In the spring we take him outside
and air him out.
Then we buy him a new suit and put
a clove of garlic in his pocket for luck.

At Christmas our lives revolve around our father.
We wire him with colored lights,
sprinkle angel's dust in his hair,
hang glass bulbs from his fingers and toes,
lay presents at his feet.

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Dancing Dad

At his wake they lifted Dad from his coffin
And asked him to dance.
Dad wouldn't even open his eyes.
"Christ," said Uncle Stash, "why in hell did you
Polish your shoes if you're not going to dance?"

They sat Dad in a chair and put a drink
In his hand. The accordion started up again.
When he'd had a few he got up
Did polkas from the old country.

Three hours later Dad was still dancing.
"Christ," said Uncle Stash, "Sit down
Or you'll scuff the polish on your shoes."
It was something we never knew about the dead,
Once they start dancing they never stop.

Three ushers grabbed him and
Latched him shut back in his coffin.
All through the funeral the muffled taps
Of Dad's dancing thumped in cramped quarters.

At the grave the priest asked whether
The deceased was really deceased.
Everyone looked up at the trees and whistled.
They said it was woodpeckers and went home.

I stayed at the grave my ear to the ground
Listening to Dad kicking his feet
Kicking his feet six feet under
Trying to tap dance his way back home.

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John Ower

Pet Python

Cunning, I discovered
Loss of legs an asset
To intricate motility.
I have little use
For a vulgar hurry.
Coiled upon myself
Into a compactness
No yogi could duplicate
I contemplate nothing.
In this way I imitate
The one perfect wisdom:
That of a stone.
I am a case study
Of war's ruthless artistry
In fitting means to ends.
Toss me a rat
So I may illustrate my point.
A flicker of my tongue
Scents aromatic mammal,
An automatic hunger
Erects my forward foot.
My slit-pupilled eye
(Superior to yours
In leaking no emotion)
Spots a fool scurry.
Lips that anticipate
With heat-tinged cavities
More than any amorist's
Lock upon my prey.
The speed of my whip
Through striking to constriction

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Outstrips your vision.
I administer an end
That is clean as a comical
Resistance will permit.
So do not be perturbed
If eyes bug with horror
Or involuntary excrement
Stains the seat of pleasure.
Struggles quickly gutter
To amusing spasms;
With death's perfect limpness
My grip is relaxed.
Nosing the cadaver
Till I come face to face
With this present piece of business,
I am ready to commence.
My orange eyes squint
In utter concentration;
Now I must gather
All my suppleness and strength.
My pink gape opens
At first within bounds
Of a possible capacity
As I engulf the head.
You quietly conjecture
I will gag upon the body,
But far more flexible
Than all your philosophies
In dealing with this entity
My rubber head distends.
In one climactic stretch
I overwhelm the pelvis;
The rest is down hill
As your expression goes.
The last flaccid inch
Of tail disappears
With a tickle in my maw.

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While I must admit to grimacing
At this stage of things
My face is refitted
With one casual yawn.
Once more my expression
Shows not a trace of strain.
With a lump inside my guts
Three times my girth,
You really must acknowledge
I am some bag of tricks.
And my digestive tract
Is efficient to a fault.
Not even the skeleton
Escapes its nether end.
Now I can forget you,
Though I wouldn't mind a bath.
It eases my digestion
To wallow like Leviathan,
Or one of your women
Bloated with a child.
If need be, I can wait
For another six months,
But I prefer more frequent meals.
If you feed me enough
I can wax into a monster
That will swallow up the world.

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Two Poems by David Bergman

Greenhouse Blues

It's not enough to talk to plants
you also have to listen. And day after day
it's the same petty complaints and trivial gossip:
the sun too bright or too dim,
the soil too wet or too dry.
The fern protests that the spider plants
are stealing all the light, and the begonia
that the Wandering Jew has sipped from her pot.
The palms reminisce of their years in grand hotels,
and the African violets plan their return to the jungle.
Some days I have it up to here, and like the priest
or the judge or the psychoanalyst, I begin
to appreciate automatons and computers; rejoice, in fact,
over the quiet self-complacence of the toaster.

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The Miniaturist

"I find beauty in things
that are small, fragile
even microscopic. Here,"
she whispered, breathing in
the dust from off a tiny fern,
"smell the aroma. I could brew
tea from it, a mild subtle blend
were the plant not so small
or so slow in growing."
When she went to the beach
she would pick up only fragments
of shells, pieces worn thin
by the waves or faded by the sun.
"I couldn't think of taking
anything that was whole." And indeed
her house was a refuge for all
that was crippled and sick:
lame dogs, blind cats, fractured birds
who had to be fed by eye-dropper.
Even the men in her life
had something broken about them.
Her former husband, a slight
good-looking delicate youth
(who bravely proved himself impotent
to half of the neighborhood women)
often was viewed, curled up
by her door, like a wounded deer
waiting for her return. Once
he had tried to beat her.
And though she gave no resistance,
he wore a cast for months.

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David Schloss

The White Room

On a wooden platform in the center of the room
The young dancer stood, her naked feet in position:
The man would rather gaze at her white feet forever
Than ever hold them in his hands, paying her well
To come to him and pose for an hour each day—
The money was enough to support her whole family.

For her it was a great romance, played out against
Bare whitewashed walls: she often dreamed of dancing
In his house, leaving that white room forever—
And in time her feet became her silent expression,
A plea to be released to him somehow and be
Transformed into one of his private possessions.

At times she could hardly keep on her thin robe,
So anxious was she to make him see and understand
That he was what she had always wanted: to be loved
And worshipped by him as some mysterious object
Distant as his love was, that she might keep herself
Apart, free from the commitments of being a wife.

For him his life stopped when he entered that place:
His death seemed imminent in his slowing breath
As her feet formed such graceful arabesques against
The darkened wood, each pose so ethereal and fine
As if outside of common time, her feet seeming
In their perfect grace to stop the moving earth.

At night he saw her striding the world in his dreams,
Crushing his chest with the weight of his own desire:
He was dark, opaque; she was pure, clear atmosphere,

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Her shining feet beneath the long flowing robes
Almost translucent, descending from a kind of heaven—
Then gasping for breath, he would rush from the room . . .

So this is how it happened: he came one day as usual,
And she danced for him on the platform at his command.
At first she played the coquette, her exquisite feet
Making the most beautiful patterns for him that day—
For she knew her power, and felt she knew the lust
Of the shy little man with his downcast mournful gaze.

Then the urge came upon her, more insistent than before:
To drop her robe, to lift the veil, and dance before him
Naked, unapproachable . . . and then she would leave—
Until, of course, he would come begging for her return.
She cast off her robe: a garment from some higher sphere
Floated into his vision, then crumpled at her feet.

How shy he was, she thought, his passion under such control.
He would avert his face—but found he couldn't move:
For a time it seemed not even a breath came—until
He rose, his eyes still cast down, and leaned toward her,
Her white feet shining from beneath the fallen robe,
Still, disembodied, waiting for his answering gesture.

Suddenly uncertain of her act, she wanted to cover herself,
But could only stand there in a frozen pirouette,
Her feet independent, trembling of their own accord.
And he, for his part, could see in detail for the first time
The tremors of tension as they held their position—
His arm struck out, and she fell unconscious to the floor.

Then, very slowly, as if it were not the natural world,
He drew a knife from beneath his robe. But she didn't wake,
The first cut into her flesh was so smooth, so quick—
She didn't cry out when the second foot was released.
And he didn't see the blood flowing onto the floor

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As he rushed from the room, his treasures in his hands . . .

Later, the young girl was found in the back garden
Where she had dragged herself to cry out for help.
And after a few days the man too was found, inside
An old abandoned well at the edge of his estate,
His decaying white body beneath the dark waters,
His pale arms floating up to the searcher's lights—

And in each hand he held a black, rotting foot . . .
Then the young girl was quite famous for a while:
There was much public sympathy for her plight,
Her need to dance and pose for her family's sake—
But she too was soon forgotten, and never married,
Despite all the reports of her great beauty.

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Vern Rutsala

The Mystery of Lost Shoes

This morning there was another one
Looking used but not worn out
Beside the road
What do they mean
Do people just abandon them at sixty
On the freeway
Suddenly tired of a single shoe
Are they some secret sign
Are they just the shoes
Of careless drivers
Dangling one foot out the window
Do they belong to insomniac passengers
Who can only sleep
With their feet in the open air
One shoe falling off in a dream
What do they mean
What are they trying to say
And this afternoon that pair
(Pairs are unnatural)
Of high heels thirty feet apart
But one was red the other brown
Imagine what you want
Are they all that's left of walkers
Single vacant tokens
Are they obscure milestones
Hex signs
But how are they lost
What carelessness prevails
Allows single shoes to fall from sealed cars
Do they contain desperate messages
Like bottles

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Was each filled with wine and passion
And thrown away
To seal deep intimacies
Are they placed there
By itinerant princes
Looking for the right fit
What do they mean
They come in all sizes
Their tongues loll
They look helpless
What do they mean
So desolate so empty
So hungry without their feet

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Two Poems by Brendan Galvin

Them

They had their own churches in their own
parts of town, some with domes like onions.
My uncle who got around told me they plastered
money on the pictures, and threw coins
at all the saints. When they died they were buried
standing up. Soon there would be no songbirds
because they ate them with greens
grown around the Virgin and a fruit tree.
My uncle said they did mean things to
the palms of their hands, toughening them
because they didn't know how to take
civil service tests. Their homemade wine
got you snorting like a palomino,
and they locked their daughters in bedrooms
till they clawed the doors like dogs.
He said their doctors were nothing but
thieves in sharkskin, the women were slaves
who scrubbed linoleum on weekends,
and one spring I watched a foreign grampa
paint a picket fence white,
whispering to it on his knees. When my cousin
married one of them with the liquescent
eyes of a bride, my aunt had to leave
the church too early. They threw confetti
on them and drove through town like mad,
honking the horns, with pink and blue
crepe paper on the cars.
After, we ate figs soaked in rum.
In Moramarco's Bakery the cakes were white
and pink, sometimes even blue. All day
Bob worked in the back, his arms powdered from
pushing the dough he chopped to loaves

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and slid in the oven on wooden shovels.
On my way home, though my mother
was going to kill me, I ripped off a warm heel
to chew while the winter dusk came down
to four feet off the ground.

Fear of Gray's Anatomy

I will not look in it again.
There the heart in section is a gas mask,
its windows gone, its hoses severed.
The spinal cord is a zipper
& the lower digestive tract
has been squeezed from a tube like toothpaste.
All my life I had hoped someday to own
at least myself, only to find I am
Flood's ligaments, the aureole of Mamma,
& the zonule of Zinn. Ruffini's endings
end in me, & the band of Gennari lies near
the island of Reil. Though I am a geography
greater than even I surmised, containing as I do
spaces & systems, promontories & at least
one reservoir, pits, tunnels, crescents,
demilunes & a daughter star, how can I celebrate
my incomplete fissures, my hippocampus &
inferior mental processes, my depressions
& internal extremities? I encompass also
ploughshare & gladiolus, iris & wing,
& the bird's nest of my cerebellum,
yet wherever I go I bear the crypts of Lieberkühn,
& among the possible malfunctionaries,
floating ribs & wandering cells, Pott's fracture,
mottles, abductors, lachrymal bones & aberrant ducts.
I will ask my wife to knit a jacket for this book,
& pretend it's a brick doorstop.
I will not open Gray's Anatomy again.

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Ricardo da Silveira Lobo Sternberg

Thumb

—one finger chiromantic exercise—

It sums our vital force and our will.
Cowards had theirs sliced and in Sparta
teachers bit those of lazy students.

It was with his thumb (imperial)
that the Emperor condemned or spared
the vanquished. "The thumb *is* Man"

wrote d'Arpetigny and was right:
idiots have very short thumbs,
new born babes, as yet lacking will,

hold theirs in the closed hand
as do the epileptic, the paralytic
and, of course, the dying.

Desbarolles claimed to have seen
the sign of eroticism in a hand
where the thumb had a phallic shape.

Over-sized thumbs belong to genius:
in politics: Robespierre, Napoleon;
in painting: Raphael, Corregio, Gandava;

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in literature: Milton, Shakespeare, Dumas
(the elder), Musset and George Sand.
If the thumb is large and spatulate

the owner has a marked prepondency
for sombre sadness, a love for soil,
a strange delight in crypts and mines.

If the thumb is badly shaped, twisted,
it is the thumb of shameful celebrity:
famous criminals, whores, perverts.

The round thumb is resolute; or resigned.
It is often found in Brittany.
The elementary thumb, thick, massive,

earthy, is the thumb of the peasant.
This sort of thumb abounds in Lapland.
The vulgar thumb is striking for size

—either too large or too small—
and for the hint of malformation.
It corresponds to simple tastes.

As to the presence of absence of hair,
a rule to keep in mind is the useful:
Vir pilousus aut libidinus aut fortis.

Balzac: the lines where our flesh ends
and the nail begins, contain the mystery
of our fluids transformed into horn.

If the thumb-nail is defective
it could be a sign of bronchio-pulmonary
supporations, according to Parmentier.

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If the nail is short, covered with flesh,
it often denotes sensuality, ambition.
If it is simply short: irony.

The dark nail marks the fatal mystic,
the roseate nail, the optimist,
curved nails, the perpetual hungry.

The thumb is yours to decipher and oppose:
for the inclinations printed on the thumb
never rule the free-willed heart.

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Conveyance: "The story I would never want Bill Wilson to read"

William S. Wilson

Río Caliente

Dear Bill,

I was going to say that this letter is difficult to write, but then you would wonder why I am writing it, so I will not make it easy for me by saying that it is difficult, but simply go ahead, if I can. Even as I write to you now, I sense you not only as the reader of this letter, I sense you eavesdropping on me as I write it. I know that you are weary of being told that you intimidate the very people whom you encourage, and I know that you can tell yourself that whatever you did for me in commenting on my writing was for my good, but I felt caught in some circularity in which you could do no wrong, even your mistaken comments could be useful, if only as obstacles that would strengthen me if I could overcome them, as I tried to explain to you what I had meant, but I can't help thinking that you were often too interested in staking out some position for yourself beyond criticism or retaliation, that

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you have often been more interested in the rightness of your position than in helping me, admitting that I asked for the help but that you undertook to read what I wrote and to comment on it for purposes of your own which I have not questioned but which must have served some self-interest on your part. I am trying not to seem shrill for several reasons which I will spell out. Or perhaps I simply don't want to be shrill. Anyway you know how scattered my education was, but you don't know that I was never trained in being criticized, I had not learned to stop pretending ignorance or incompetence. A comment such as *ramshackle* on my story was new to me, and I think you underestimated the handicap of my education, its blandness, and while you remained bitter and spoke of the acid bath of criticism or of how you were patronized, you were being patronized in some of the best places while I was being educated for the suburbs, and you are tougher than you credit yourself with being (which encourages me to write this letter), and I was more hurt by your helpful suggestions—if only because I needed so much help—than I ever told you. Which is not to say that I also may not have misunderstood your comments.

Your last note to me was now almost two years ago. I've reread it, and I see both that you were covering yourself, wanting to be impressive in ways that seem to me contrary to the ways in which I do find you impressive—and so much of your ambition (which you did not admit to) is revenge (which you would not admit to)—and also that I misunderstood your final *assignment* or suggestion to me. You had given me, not the motifs for the stories, but the impulse, the energy, as you said, to overcome the intimidations, and I had written as you had suggested, "The story I would not want my mother and father to read," "The story I would not want Owen to read," "The story I would not want my daughters to read," and while I didn't use those titles, you probably could tell which was which, and yes, in spite of some negativism in the technique (I was afraid of revealing myself, but I was not only afraid), writing with that impulse did get me

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past some of my inhibitions, although you seemed by those assignments to be pushing me toward the "confessional" poets even as in your suggestions for reading you steered me away from them, and you certainly (out of your theory, I know, and I do believe that you believe in it, but I never quite understood it, after all it wasn't *my* theory, and you had told me that style and meaning had reciprocal implications, so that I could scarcely have your style imposed on me without having something of your meanings imposed on me, and even now if I think in terms of imposed versus immanent implications I could not tell where my thought began and yours ended, and you would say that it didn't matter, that it was just something you picked up from Whitehead or somebody, and you would refer me to your sources, but I think you were being elusive, not modest, and it was you I was interested in, not Whitehead)—and now I have lost my idea and my syntax. Anyway your final suggestion to me, to write "The story I would not want Bill Wilson to read," I took as your attempt to get rid of me, and I did not write it, in fact I stopped writing, and I return to that theme now only because I have wanted to write you a letter and have not had the self-stylization (I know you enjoy those Germanic phrases) or the point-of-view from which to write a letter, and you did stress point-of-view as the problem which would dissolve complacencies and yield the unexpected resolution of the story. So I needed an excuse to write to you, and now looking over my stories and your notes, tossing them into the fireplace and starting a fire with them in the evening—I have carried out the trash for the last time in my life—I see that you may not have meant me to stop sending stories, you may have meant me to reach beyond the awareness that you would be reading what I had been writing, meant for me to write that story but to send it to you in spite of the implications of the title, you were trying to help me stop being afraid of you but also to transcend some painful self-limitation—and you did not want my fear of you to be your fault, but if it weren't, then it was only another painful weakness of my own—anyway I think

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that you were ambivalent about reading my things, I know you felt put upon by so many demands on your time—what you had been through with your marriage, and the children —and I was not used to courage, I was brought up not to ask for help, and I was lazy enough to find it easiest to read that title as an attempt to be rid of me. But now I have found the point-of-view, the excuse, for this letter, which will be my last story, and which is, in several senses but in no ambiguous sense, the story I would not want Bill Wilson to read—

—I knew when I saw you at that New Year's Eve reception —you looked aghast when you saw me sitting in the row of chairs arranged so formally along the wall, I suppose to make space and to make people behave themselves—that you had heard about the accident (I am tempted to delay here, but then I remember that each part of a story, each word if possible, was to work frontally as well as laterally, so I will not merely say *accident*, I will attempt something of that *convex meniscus*, to use one of the images you used for writing that you liked, which I know you said was just something you remembered from high school chemistry, and didn't reflect any scientific experience or knowledge, but I never seemed to remember images like that from chemistry, still I got the point that surprise endings were out, that exposition was difficult if not impossible, that one had always to be *in medias res*), I knew that you knew that my husband and my daughters were dead, and how they had died, when I saw you standing there with a coat and tie among men in tuxedos and women in evening gowns, and I could retrieve from your clothes your calculations as to how close you could come to them without becoming too distant from yourself, and I saw the glass in your hand, and I don't know what you thought I was thinking, I had not responded to your last note or to your lengthy criticisms, my life had become a tragedy but I lacked a tragic sense of life, I was trying to look neither approachable nor unapproachable, I did not want to attend a New Year's Eve reception, of course, but in the easy paradoxes and formulas which make it so difficult to think about my experience, my

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absence would have been a presence, and I thought that I would make it easier on everyone by putting in a brief appearance early in the evening: and I wanted to be unfaithful to my grief. Looking at you—and I had not heard that you had been in the hospital, because friends stopped telling me sad or disquieting news, and I did not know that you had enough reasons for your own wintry desolations, and I don't know what we could have done for each other anyway, I don't know how we might have helped each other, I was as you might have noticed incapable of eating, and was already drinking, and looking at you I focused on the glass of ice in your hand, probably plain soda-water—if you have been waiting for my charge of self-righteousness, here it is, I saw you standing there in clothes which let you look the economic or social inferior of people whom you undoubtedly felt superior to, after you had lectured me against irony, and you drinking nothing while others drank alcohol, or you drinking white wine while they drank Scotch, I had been able to grasp your self-righteousness on the level of these details—partly because you tried to train me in concreteness, although my concrete details often seemed to me illustrations of your generalizations about concrete details, and if I could catch, on the level of concrete details, that you were much too much out to get people, scanning for errors instead of applauding, I had more trouble on more abstract levels because you were so practiced at escaping, were if not glib at least well prepared, I think you confused being correct with being good, so that I could never make my point because you seemed determined to be in the right whatever the cost, you were a Proteus who changed shape if anyone tried to touch you, or if anyone did touch you. I was saying that I was looking at the glass in your hand and thinking of glass or of ice—I did not decide which—as the failure of light, a line of imagery I knew you would resist, although I did not know, as I have said, how sick you had been, and perhaps you have changed. (I hear my assumption in that sentence, that suffering chastens. Sorry.) You were trapped beside the mantlepiece by that man who produced ethnic records, I could see

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the struggle on your face between boredom and searching for some fact to let him know that you knew something about his subject—I say only what you said first about yourself, that you knew most of what you knew from book reviews, those self-accusations which forestalled accusations, deafening yourself to criticism, but it was true, you were often only as interesting as the most recent paperback you had read, though you did (do) have a flair for what you call your colloquial undercut, and I was (am) grateful for your explanations, I always thought that you were a good teacher, I never denied you that. I don't know which of us left the party first, I didn't see you when I said my thank-yous and good-nights.

I was not interested in a poem about a glass of ice and the frequencies of light, I knew in advance your comment, that if I had to work with such an image, to commit myself to its implications with precision, and I sat there remote from my own indictments of your self-protective and self-serving tact, your endless tact, I had grown, not compassionate, but beyond caring much about anything or anyone, I suppose one of "the indifferent children of the earth," to quote as you would quote so quickly a line from *Hamlet* that I would recognize but wouldn't have remembered aptly. I am writing now somewhere in a mood of indifferent festivity because death is ripening and is within my reach, just about my death of choice, cirrhosis, with the complication of hepatitis that I knew I could count on Mexico for, and an operation by the local "doctor" that I underwent as I would undergo an ultimate poem, and I will describe that later, but not to hurt you. I am trying not to terrorize you for your own good. I thought that I would be unable to write at all after the operation, for I haven't had the energy even to think, but somehow I have this surge which I suppose has some chemical base—I haven't even been able to drink for the last few days—so perhaps my body is consuming itself, I am saprozoic (at least I have *our* dictionary here with me, you might be amused to know)—and I guess my body is releasing its reserves of cortisone, or tapping its reservoir of adrenalin—although the truest

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image is from that W.C. Fields movie we all saw as part of that subscription series, where he burns up the wooden parts of the steamboat in its own steam engine in order to win the race—for beyond any adrenergics is the true source of energy, my nearness to my own death, I suppose you would say the energy of my position in relation to a force, although you would remind me here to think of the verb, *dying*, rather than the noun, *death*, you see I do remember, but also I do mean *death*, hitherto my most abstract relationship, but one that is becoming quite concrete. And no one can tell me what I am allowed to mean.

I hope you will not think me cruel to write this description: the plane hopped such short distances, from island to island, that it should have been small and had two seats in each row, like a streetcar or a train, but it had three seats, so I sat at the window seat behind the row with Owen, Amy and Elise in front of me, the girls taking turns at their window seat, although there was less and less to see as it grew darker, and I could almost see through the backs of their seats the excitement and pleasure, and I did see an occasional hand reaching between the seats, an occasional face peeking at me over the top of the seat, the girls so pale and thin, my daughters who would never be sturdy, the aloof or reserved look of sickly children underlying the normal eagerness of arriving in the night at a Caribbean island, and the plane landed on the water, a few passengers disembarked, and then it took off, the last of the sunset, and then the last of the passengers after we landed in the dark amidst small white boats, and then the anticipation as I remembered this flight with Owen ten years before, and wondered about the wisdom of returning to the island with the children, when we had known it only without them, but I occupied myself thinking about the three of them in front of me, and how I made four, or how Amy, Elise and I, three females, made three, the women Owen wondered aloud how he could make happy, or as he used to say sometimes, how he could shut us up, and Amy and Elise were two together, daughters and sisters, sometimes as different from

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me as boys, girls who were allowed to look like boys sometimes, so unlike my childhood, my girlhood, for which I still wanted reparations—I had had a layette and a bassinet, and when I was at Goucher my mother was still sending me lingerie from Altman's—although at least nothing in that girlhood tempted me to prolong it, so I am grateful for that—and Amy and Elise looked like each other, although Elise looked more like Owen, and Amy looked more like me, especially after I had to get glasses for reading, so that I could say that I was to Amy as Amy was to Elise as Elise was to Owen, and though our children conveyed us to each other, as their frail bodies bodied forth the sensitivities we had both deliberately preserved in ourselves, although not our physical strength, because they, in that ugly word I hate so much, had that syndrome, although in my rage I never could see the connection between their poor vision, the brittle bones, and the allergies, I could not then understand what the doctors said because I knew they meant that Amy and Elise would never be healthy, never eat a normal meal, and that my complex love for my daughters would be complicated by pity and fear, while the attitude of our friends toward their sickness was too correct—some smell of liberal self-congratulation was in the air when they served the right foods without calling attention to their consideration—weren't they angry, like I was? Aren't they angry, like I am? I wanted to file a complaint somewhere. Several complaints.

The plane circled too long, even I could tell that, now that we were the last four passengers, thinking to myself once upon a time there was a woman and she had two daughters, they set out with her husband, their father, to find the island where . . . , and as the plane took too long I remembered that marvelous medical historian's story about flying over the Andes and looking round to see the stewardess stretched out on the floor in the aisle of the plane with a rosary held to her breast—he was doing research for a history of medicine in South America—and his stories seemed so riotously funny that evening in New Haven when he kept accidentally knock-

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ing the chairs and ashtrays out of alignment, until the whole hard-edged apartment was in subtle disarray, and I gave a surreptitious shove to the wooden triangle containing the antique billiard balls which Si had placed on the coffee table as an *objet trouvé* but consistent with his own aesthetic of sharp-focus geometry, I think you said that Si's Bauhaus managed to sublate Surrealism, as you used a word I had never heard anyone work into a conversation, I think you sublated a little Surrealism yourself, more than you knew, and I wanted to tell that evening how I used to shop in stores which had been a hundred feet or more below where we were then sitting, before the urban renewal had torn down that market street and put up that building with the first several storeys a parking garage, but I never got to describe myself as a good Fulbright wife shopping in the little markets instead of the supermarket for the ingredients of a peasant casserole I had learned to make that year abroad, I never got to tell my story then or even later going down in the elevator past street-level to the underground parking lot, and in some nervousness I admiringly took the lid off a primitive basket that Si with his incredible eye had bought in Brazil—something functional which had perfect classical lines and echoed his own prints or rhymed with the Barcelona chairs—but I didn't tell my story, I was feeling dowdy graduate-student wife, and remembering that your wife—you seemed less to have gotten married than to have joined the circus—had said that the wives of behaviorist psychologists look like laboratory mice before she asked Owen what he studied, and he was embarrassed for her and for me, but they forgot her remark about mice because she was off on his mid-westernism, and how men from the American mid-west were the last men who knew how to walk like men without knowing that they were doing so—and in the hand-woven basket were Si's dirty clothes, he was furious that I had discovered that the object so perfectly deployed in an apartment which was more a still-life painting than a home was *functional*, and I thought only that he was clever to think of using it for a laundry basket and to keep it

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in the living room, and I sank back in my chair, I shrank, knowing that my posture was not making the chair look good —a plump-faced woman who looked as though if she were to lose twenty pounds she would be beautiful or at least pretty, but I have lost twice that much now. So it was one of those evenings, as though Si gave a party like that to prove his theory of people to himself all over again—and the plane was taking too long to land, we were off our schedule, and I was remembering nonsense, and why couldn't I have been like Charlotte when Warren upset her coffee table breaking all those cups and she said without a trace of irony, Oh that's all right, they were very old anyway, and I don't think Warren ever realized —and I came back from those memories to the row of seats in front of me, to the three, one of whom made me a wife, two of whom made me a mother, three of whom made me a woman in my own eyes, though I know that now that would be a counter-revolutionary thought and I wouldn't have wanted Amy and Elise to think like that when they grew up, and if I could make myself into a writer I don't know what that would make me, different from what I was yet more myself I hoped, but the ambition was important, and the plane was circling too long, the lone stewardess came back to say that the fog was thick and that we were running low on fuel and would land in the dark on calm seas, and of course we could depend upon ourselves to behave well, I had grown up with monograms on everything, I heard the clicks of the other three seatbelts, the lights in the plane dimmed and went out, and we sat waiting in the vivid darkness.

When the plane touched I felt the smack of the impact and heard screams as the plane ripped along the seams, and lights came on in the forward section as it tore free and sank while I was being lifted in my seat high into the air and leaned over looking down onto Owen, Amy and Elise reaching up, it was like looking down onto people on the seat below one on a ferris wheel as one held on for dear life, and then the lights, the front half of the plane, and their faces disappeared, and I sat tilted up in my end of the plane as it gradually subsided,

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and I waited, silent and alone, trapped in my lifeboat, until the sky bruised with light in the east, and I can quote the Bible without worrying about all of the implications: "And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their place." Nice, isn't it? And morning came sooner than I could think, and my perplexed rescue, bobbing up and down in that truncated airplane, not feeling lost, knowing that I was 25,000 miles to the east of myself, 25,000 miles to the west of myself, I could find myself anytime I decided to look.

I flew, was flown, back to New York. You had not heard from me for a year, I saw no reason to get in touch. I drank quietly and conscientiously, thinking of my liver turning as orange as a life-jacket. I will not repress these images, now that I am capsizing, though I can hear you complaining about women confessional poets dredging their hearts, and I could quote you on how comparisons deplete the actuality of the things compared. But I am now mistress of my own depletions. I drank, but I underestimated my strength. God I was robust. I stayed in the city, selling the house, arranging every detail, finally achieving an order so that everything is as it will be after I have died, and here I have nothing that I don't need for the next few days, the maid does everything, and as I read through your letters and my poems and stories I toss them onto this comfortable fire. I could be out of this place in five minutes if I had to be.

I flew here, not because you had mentioned Río Caliente in a story, because after all you learned the name from me, though you left off the accent: Río. Everyone has been pleasant, I feel that I am almost a type they know how to handle me so well, they seem familiar with me (unless it is my familiarity with death that they sense; again I almost didn't say that—we discussed Lawrence, Bill, *The Plumed Serpent*, and you scored the points, but also you never heard me out). In any event (forgive my mischief—I know you hate the phrase) the state of medicine here is complicated—I could tell you of some acquaintances I drank with in the evening who had had in-

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curable cancer in the States and here have been cured with Laetrile—they come back every year for triumphant vacations —and this isn't voodoo, but real doctors, trained in the States, who used medicines that weren't approved there, perhaps they are now, but anyway these people tell me about being examined—a *sigmoidoscopy*, no less—and about growths as big as grapefruits or oranges that have shrunk to the size of grapes—I love their gratitude as they talk about their operations, their Laetrile enemas, their "Wobe-Mugos" enzymes, and they told me how well I looked and discouraged me from drinking the water. I am so tired now I must get to the interesting part of my operation. I wanted nothing to do with the antiseptic young doctors at the one-storey hospital they're all so proud of, but the maid told me about a local man who performs miraculous operations, and I agreed to see him for the entertainment. I underestimated him, however, for he is impressive, and if anyone wanted to be cured, he could probably do it, although he has enough sense to send some patients to the hospital, part of an understanding with the healthy young doctors that is beyond me. They just don't draw the line between appearance and reality at the same place you and I do, and perhaps both of us underestimated the amount of illusion in our perceptions. I am not going to describe the operation I let him perform for my liver. He gave me marvelous stuff—I felt no pain, but if I wanted to be aware I could be, and if I didn't want to be, I could drift off, which I mostly did. A young boy stood by throughout, all expressionless intelligence, but when the doctor, my shaman, was ready to sew me up, the boy stepped forward opening the box he held in front of his heart, and while my witchdoctor apposed the edges of the incision, the boy would take out an enormous black ant, and when the ant had seized the edges with its mandibles, he would cut the thorax from the ant head, thus making one stitch. And so I was sutured with eighteen ants, a dozen miles from a hospital that is the pride of the Indians. And if truth were to be told, I have felt better —weak, but clear—since the operation, and I look at my

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incision with admiration, it seems to me an image of unquestionable beauty, an act of poetic truth, although I would not want to have to define my terms.

I was going to go through your comments and answer some of them, quote them back to you: "the problem with the story is that you set up the situation so laboriously that it is obviously a set-up. Try to get closer to the magic than this: something should appear without apparent cause, or be set up before your eyes and you be disbelieving yet incapable of disbelief. You will think that I merely lack a sense of humor. . . ." But I don't want to estrange you. You will think that *I* lack a sense of humor. I have two final points. First, I have realized, while writing this letter and reading your comments, that you had expected to learn from me, and that part of your disappointment in me was not you as teacher disappointed in me as student, but you as student disappointed in me as teacher, and I am willing to see now that your saving grace has been that you always expected to learn. Naïve of you, Bill, but I forgive you.

If what I have just written is true, and if you have not known it, then you have learned something from me, and perhaps I have not disappointed you entirely. And so my second point if I am the teacher. You have been so articulate that your attempts to lift me beyond intimidations were themselves intimidating, though we discussed our fears about writing, and I knew that I hurt you by being afraid of you. Now I have told you my story, or enough of it, I feel more good will than you might perhaps credit me with, and you might say as you tirelessly said of my stories, at least of my adjectives, that I should render the evidence, not render the verdict, but anyway I am quite lively now, a woman who successfully absconded to Mexico in order to abandon her life, and I want you to do something for me that may do something for you, and that is to accept from me the sort of assignment that I used to accept from you. Now that you have read my letter, write the story that you would want me to read. Goodbye, Bill. I'm going the rest of the way on my own.

Best regards,
C.

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Self Portrait

William Gass

The Art of Fiction LXV

In the book-bound alcove off the bare room where he writes when at home, William Gass gave this interview in July of 1976. Sitting in cut-offs and T-shirt, sipping on a bottle of Ballantine ale, Gass resembles a boyish headmaster at his Sunday ease. When he talks the small shifts of his compact body, the voice's inflections, and the mind's dartings reveal a writer harsh on himself and his work, though generous in his responses.

Now 53, Gass is professor of philosophy at Washington University in St. Louis. His books are: Omensetter's Luck, *a novel (1966);* In the Heart of the Heart of the Country, *stories (1968);* Fiction and the Figures of Life, *essays (1970);* Willie Masters' Lonesome Wife, *a fictional essay (1971); and* On Being Blue, *criticism (1976). Parts of* The Tunnel, *his novel in progress, have been appearing since 1969.*

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INTERVIEWER

Do you feel you are writing full throat now?

GASS

I hope so, but if I am a hound, at what am I baying? I am basically a closet romantic, a tame wild man. When I was in college I closed the closet door behind me. Then, for all sorts of reasons, some artistic if you like, but at bottom personal as bottoms are, I became a formalist: I became detached; I emphasized technique; I practiced removal. I was a van. I took away things. And I became a toughie, a hard-liner. When I was in High School, I chanted Thomas Wolfe and burned as I thought Pater demanded and threatened the world as a good Nietzschean should. Then at college, in a single day, I decided to change my handwriting . . . which meant, I realized later, a change in the making of the words which even then were all of me I cared to have admired. It was a really odd decision. Funny. Strange. I sat down with the greatest deliberation and thought how I would make each letter of the alphabet from that moment on. A strange thing to do. Really strange. And for years I carefully wrote in this new hand—I wrote everything: marginal notes, reminders, messages—in a hand that was very Germanic and stiff. It had a certain artificial elegance, and from time to time I was asked to address wedding invitations, but when I look at that hand now I am dismayed, if not a little frightened, it is so much like strands of barbed wire. Well, that change of script was a response to my family situation and in particular to my parents. I fled an emotional problem and hid myself behind a wall of arbitrary formality. Nevertheless, I think that if I eventually write anything which has any enduring merit, it will be in part because of that odd alteration. I submitted myself to a comparatively formal, rather rigorous, kind of philosophical training. I stuffed another tongue in my mouth. It changed my tastes. It wasn't Shelley any longer, it was Pope. It wasn't even Melville, it was James. Most of these changes were for the better because, being a little older, I saw more in my new choices than I had in my old ones. But now,

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after maybe 20 years of not going near Nietzsche—of even being embarrassed by my youthful enthusiasms—I find him exciting again. My handwriting has slowly relaxed and is now the sloppy kindergarten scrawl I had as a child. I suspect the same kind of thing is happening in my work. I am ready to go in any direction. But I hope I've learned that the forms are inherent, that the formal discipline is inherent, so that when I want to start improvising I won't have forgotten how to dance. It wasn't until I was ready to come out of my formal phase that I began to read Rilke. Once I took my thumb out of my mouth—well—soon there was no dike. So now I try to manage two horses: there is one called Valéry and another called Rilke. I remember I once compared writing to the image of the charioteer in the *Phaedrus*. Intellectually, Valéry is still the person I admire most among artists I admire most; but when it comes to the fashioning of my own work now, I am aiming at a Rilkean kind of celebrational object, thing, *Dinge*.

INTERVIEWER

How much did this change have to do with your family?

GASS

I think a lot of it was deeply personal. Every powerful reason is a cause, accounts for a condition. When you decide to change your handwriting, and when you sit down and spend a day or more making new characters, you've got to be in an outraged and outrageous state of mind. I simply rejected my background entirely. I decided, as one of my characters says, to pick another cunt to come from. Did I come out of that hole in the wallpaper, Rilke has his hero, Malte, wonder. I just had to make myself anew—or rather, *seem* to. So I simply started to do it. And I think it very obvious now, though it wasn't obvious to me then, that I should pick the way I formed words to be the point where I should try to transform everything. The alphabet, for Christ's sake—I would have changed that, if I'd been able. So all along one principal

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motivation behind my writing has been to be other than the person I am. To cancel the consequences of the past. I am not the person who grew up in some particular place, though people try to label me as a local Midwestern writer; but I never had roots; all my sources (as a writer) were chosen. I chose to be influenced by this or that book or chose to be defined as the author of this or that. I think that for a long time I was simply emotionally unable to handle my parents' illnesses. My mother was an alcoholic and my father was crippled by arthritis and his own character. I just fled. It was a cowardly thing to do, but I simply would not have survived. I still hate scenes unless I make them. My situation certainly wasn't more severe than most people endure at some time in their lives, but I was not equipped to handle it. What is perhaps psychologically hopeful is that in *The Tunnel* I am turning back to inspect directly that situation and that means I haven't entirely rejected it. On the other hand, I am taking a damn long time to write the book. But I don't know. What is psychologically best for a writer is what produces his best work. I suspect that in order for me to produce my best work I have to be angry. At least I find that easy. I am angry all the time.

INTERVIEWER

Have you spent a good part of your writing life getting even?

GASS

Yes...yes. Getting even is one great reason for writing. The precise statement of the motive is tricky; but the clearest expression of my unwholesome nature and my mean motives (apart from trying to write well) appears in a line I like in "In the Heart of the Heart of the Country." The character says "I want to rise so high that when I shit I won't miss anybody." But maybe I say it's a motive because I like the line. Anyway, my work proceeds almost always from a sense of aggression. And usually I am in my best working mood when I am, on

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the page, very combative, very hostile. That's true even when I write to praise, as is often the case. If I write about Colette, as I am now, my appreciation will be shaped by the sap-tongued idiots who don't perceive her excellence. I also take considerable pleasure in giving obnoxious ideas the best expression I can. But getting even isn't necessarily vicious. There are two ways of getting even: one is destructive and the other is restorative. It depends on how the scales are weighted. Justice, I think, is the word I want.

INTERVIEWER

Isn't there a line in *Willie Masters' Lonesome Wife* about the pencil moving against the page with anger?

GASS

Something like that, sure. I am developing a theory about that in an essay I'm writing on creativity. One doesn't want to generalize from what might be just a private psychology, but it seems to me the emotion is central. There is another sentence from *Willie* that should be mentioned here, though: "how close in the end is a cunt to a concept; we enter both with joy." That's the other line of mine I remember with pleasure. And both express something very close to me. If someone asks me, "Why do you write?" I can reply by pointing out that it is a very dumb question. Nevertheless there is an answer. I write because I hate. A lot. Hard. And if someone asks me the inevitable next dumb question, "Why do you write the way you do?" I must answer that I wish to make my hatred acceptable because my hatred is much of me, if not the best part. Writing is a way of making the writer acceptable to the world—every cheap dumb nasty thought, every despicable desire, every noble sentiment, every expensive taste. There isn't very much satisfaction in getting the world to accept and praise you for things that the world is prepared to praise. The world is prepared to praise only shit. One wants to make sure that the complete self, with all its qualities, is not just accepted but approved. . . not just approved—whoopeed.

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INTERVIEWER

Did your years at Kenyon College have much influence on your later aesthetic positions?

GASS

Not directly. I was already very fascinated by Ransom's stuff when I was in high school. I wrote an article on Ransom and sent it to him at the *Kenyon Review*. It was godawful, but he was very sweet and returned it with a nice letter. I'd never met him, but I was so in love with the man's "manner" I scrawled his initials in the books of his I owned and pretended to others that he'd signed them. When I got to Kenyon he did remember my essay, or was polite enough to pretend to. And that "manner" was real. When I was going to school there, the faculty were very much under the influence of Ransom and the New Criticism, but I think that influence was so widespread you'd have found it most places. I did audit a few courses that Ransom taught, but I didn't take any courses in English while I was at Kenyon. I was busy taking philosophy and other things of that sort. And I found that I fought English classes. I was such a smartass I thought I knew much more than the instructor. No, my pretentions got ground beneath another heel. I couldn't get published in the literary magazine—not a colorful fart, not a thumbprint. The students were very good writers; some of them were publishing in the *Review* already. And I held a small limp pen; I was terrified and crushed; I couldn't get anywhere; I was unbelievably bad; I was lousy. I knew the formalist ideas were in the air, of course, but I didn't really come face to face with them in any extensive way until I went to grad school, so I think that the influence of Kenyon was predominantly philosophical.

INTERVIEWER

What was your orientation when you were working on your

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Ph.D. in philosophy at Cornell?

GASS

I wanted to work in aesthetics, but they didn't have anybody who was interested in the area, and I didn't take any courses in the subject. They had a nice elderly man the students called "Bedsprings" because he rocked from his toes to his heels all the time and stared at the girls. Most of my courses were in language analysis, philosophy of science, logic, and the theory of meaning. The faculty finally settled on allowing me one wild paper a year which they would be agreeable about and not grade. What I eventually ended up doing was working with the philosophy of language and the theory of metaphor with Max Black. I had to learn to write analytical stuff for all these people, and it is not my natural manner. I hated it in lots of ways because I was working against the grain all the time. But it was very good for me. It was a superb faculty.

INTERVIEWER

Do you still retain that rigor?

GASS

I can still use it, though it isn't easy. I still admire it. I hope I can recognize its many fakes. Now I don't have to be what one would call "rigorous" very often any more except in some classroom situations, because when I'm writing I find it very difficult to harmonize a desire for a certain kind of style with the rigor and precision appropriate to a certain kind of subject. The only compromise I can manage is expressed by the hope that I've done a reasonably thorough job on any philosophical issue before I start to write, so that beneath that fluffy flamboyant style and all that sweet sugary rhetoric there is some real cake—some sense at least of the complications of the problem. But I don't pretend to be treating issues in any philosophical sense. I am happy to be aware of how complicated, and how far from handling certain things prop-

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erly I am, when I am swinging so wildly around.

INTERVIEWER

It seems that the style no matter how flamboyant is always very precise.

GASS

Well, I hope so, and you are a kind person to suggest it. Rigor is achieved by pushing things very hard and trying to uncover every possible ramification, nuance, and aspect, and then ordering those things very, very carefully. I think that's always valuable. Still, the kind of ordering you get in philosophy is quite different from the kind you try for in literature, although there is a similarity—an analogy. That's one of the reasons why I admire mathematicians, I guess. You found beauty listening to Austin give a lecture—he presented a beautiful landscape of the mind. Everything was so crisp and beautifully drawn. It was like watching a good draftsman. It wasn't as profound or original as Wittgenstein, for instance, but it was really a pleasure to hear such a careful disposal of ideas: a trash bag anybody'd be happy to plug on TV.

INTERVIEWER

Is Austin's and Searle's notion of speech acts of any use to you as a writer?

GASS

If you start talking about speech acts, what you are doing is connecting the notion of writing with a concept of performance. I think contemporary fiction is divided between those who are still writing performatively and those who are not. Writing for voice, in which you imagine a performance in the auditory sense going on, is traditional and old fashioned and dying. The new mode is not performative and not auditory. It's destined for the printed page, and you are really supposed to read it the way they teach you to read in

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speed reading. You are supposed to crisscross the page with your eye, getting references and gists; you are supposed to see it flowing on the page, and not sound it in the head. If you do sound it, it is so bad you can hardly proceed. It can't all have been written by Dreiser, but it sounds like it. *Gravity's Rainbow* was written for print, *JR* was written by the mouth for the ear. By the mouth for the ear: that's the way I'd like to write. I can still admire the other—the way I admire surgeons, broncbusters, and tight ends. As writing, it is that foreign to me.

INTERVIEWER

But in *Willie Masters' Lonesome Wife*...

GASS

Oh, sure, there I'm playing around with it....Yes, I was trying out some things. Didn't work. Most of them didn't work. I was trying to find a spatial coordinate to go with the music, but my ability to manipulate the spatial and visual side of the medium was so hopelessly amateurish (I was skating on one galosh), and the work also had to go through so many hands, that the visual business was only occasionally successful, and most of that was due to the excellent design work of Larry Levy, not me. Too many of my ideas turned out to be only ideas—situations where the reader says: "Oh yeah, I get the idea," but that's all there is to get, the idea. I don't give a shit for ideas—which in fiction represent inadequately embodied projects—I care only for affective effects. I'm still fooling around with visual business, but I am thinking of a way to make them *sound*. One problem, for instance, is trying to get the sense (in print) of different lines of language being sounded at the same time, or alternately, or at different speeds or pitch, as in music.

INTERVIEWER

You've said that the love of the word as a resonance or shape is the least understood of all aesthetic phenomena.

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GASS

One of the things which children do early on is discover the ability they have to surround themselves with their own sensory world. Shit, piss, and bellow, kick and wiggle: that's it! I think that what often makes writers is a continued sense of the marvelous palpable quality of making words and sounding them. My god how Beckett has it. I have a very strong feeling about that love of making sounds. I think it must have been very enjoyable—in the old days—to form letters with your quill or pen and hand. I, for example, still have an old typewriter. An electric takes away from the expressiveness of the key. It was very important for Rilke to send a copy of the finished poem in his beautiful hand to somebody, because *that was* the poem, not the printed imitation. Writing by hand, mouthing by mouth: in each case you get a very strong physical sense of the emergence of language—squeezed out like a well-formed stool—what satisfaction!—what bliss! That's another reason why I like the metaphor, in *Willie Masters'*, of cunt and concept. As an artist you are dealing with a very abstract thing when you are dealing with language (and if you don't realize that, you miss everything), yet suddenly it is there in your mouth with great particularity—drawl, lisp, spit. When the word passes out into the world that particularity is ignored; print obliterates it; type has no drawl. But if you can write for that caressing, slurring, foul-mouthed singing drunken voice . . . that's a miracle. Gertrude Stein said poetry was caressing nouns, and I think she was right, only I wouldn't leave out verbs or prepositions, articles or adverbs, anything. . . .

As a writer you are, of course, aware of the arbitrary relationship of symbol-sounds to their meanings; but no real writer wants it that way. In doing *On Being Blue,* I was struck by the way in which meanings are historically attached to words: it is so accidental, so remote, so twisted. A word is like a schoolgirl's room—a complete mess—so the great thing is to make out a way of seeing it all as ordered, as right, as inferred and following. Now when you take language out of the

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realm in which it is produced and put it in poetry and fiction, you transform it completely. Maybe *that* is the least understood aesthetic phenomenon. That process of transformation is perhaps the essence of creative activity. And if you take really bowel turning material, from the point of view of its pragmatic importance in the world, and surround it like kitty litter with stuff that is there purely for play, then you can get an electric line between the two poles clothes would turn white simply hanging on. The electricity of Elizabethan drama is total. They are talking always of life and death matters, but they are standing there playing with their mouths.

INTERVIEWER

Do you sound words over and over to yourself at the typewriter?

GASS

Yes. One time, two times, three times, times, times, times .... That's the final test. When that goes well, all's well—well, nearly all's well. And it stands. A bad line or a missed start will get scratched down so deeply in my head like a schoolkid's desk he's trying to carve 'fuck,' 'cunt,' and his name on, that it becomes extremely hard for me to start over and go at the sentence in a different way. I am almost never able to do that. If I've a botch at the beginning, I have to keep fiddling around until I have somehow fiddled it into a squeak, the squeak into the score. This damn imprinting is one of the hardest things I have to overcome. But I also appreciate Valéry's account of how a poem came to him because and while he was walking the meter. When work is going well for me—which is rarely—I have a clear metrical sense of sound and pace. This whole problem is vital. When one section is singing, it sings the rest. I've heard many of the speeches in Elkin that way. The song began and sang itself. Prose gives you flexibility, and you want to use it to shift the whole mode or manner of voice within a paragraph or within a single sentence. So you must have a notion, some clues, which will do the job. Joyce fiddled around with a lot of

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things trying to get that done, but I didn't get those clues of his until I heard him on records. Then I realized how he should be sung and that he had in mind a notation which isn't present in the book.

One problem is that the reader isn't conditioned, hasn't the time, intelligence, patience, to perform the work. When you think of being a good reader, you tend to think of yourself or somebody as having a sharp eye, quick intelligence, who pays attention, follows this resonance of meaning or that, and has a good memory for what happened before, and all that admirable true crap. But who thinks of the reader as an oral interpreter? When I read a traditional novel, I never remember anything except language, the rhythms in the language patterns, and I do have a good memory for that. I think I forgot the basic plot of *Middlemarch* hours after I read it, and it was of course a terrific book. But the impression, the quality of its style, that I think I shall remember forever. One used to read Henry James aloud. It's the only way to read him. But it takes time; you've got to figure out how to do it, and all this alters the temporal reach of the work entirely. Beckett is our best example. You look at the text and you see all those pauses. You say to yourself, yes, there are pauses, but you don't pause. You don't perform it. If you don't perform it, you ain't got it. In music, you can't *think* the rests, pretend the silences. There happen to be some splendid Beckett manuscripts at Washington University, and they taught me a great deal. I went over a little story called "Ping" one day with the idea of reading it aloud. It's about six or seven pages, but it is a half an hour or more in the reciting. If you do it properly, well spaced, larded with silence, then it's overpowering. You gotta wait, you know, and wait, and wait, and wait, and we just don't do that sort of thing—the world turns—who has time to wait between two syllables for just a little literary revelation? A lot of modern writers, I remember saying, are writing for the fast mind that speeds over the text like those noisy bastards in motor boats. The connections are all spatial and

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all at various, complicated, intellectual levels. They stand to literature as fast food to food.

INTERVIEWER

Have you considered giving the reader some kind of extra-textual directions on how to read as Barth does in *Lost in the Funhouse*?

GASS

"The Pedersen Kid" has some. *Willie* is full of them. I keep fussing around, trying to find ways to symbolize what I want. But notation . . . notation . . . what a difficulty! The myth is that Joyce tried to indicate that the speed passages in *Finnegan's Wake* should be taken by variously spacing the words. In the novel I'm working on now, I want, for instance, a certain word to sound like a bell the whole time the reader is reading certain lines. I want this bong going bong all the bonging time. I'm trying to figure out what device will work —on the page—not only to give the proper instruction to the reader, but make him begin to hear it—dead dead dead dead—the way it's supposed to go. But as soon as you try to note it the page goes crazy and you get a dozen other things you want no part of.

INTERVIEWER

Is the reader an adversary for you?

GASS

No. I don't think much about the reader. Ways of reading are adversaries—those theoretical ways. As far as writing something is concerned, the reader really doesn't exist. The writer's business is somehow to create in the work something which will stand on its own and make its own demands; and if the writer is good he discovers what those demands are, and he meets them, and creates this thing which readers can then do what they like with. Gertrude Stein said, "I write for myself and strangers," and then eventually she said that she

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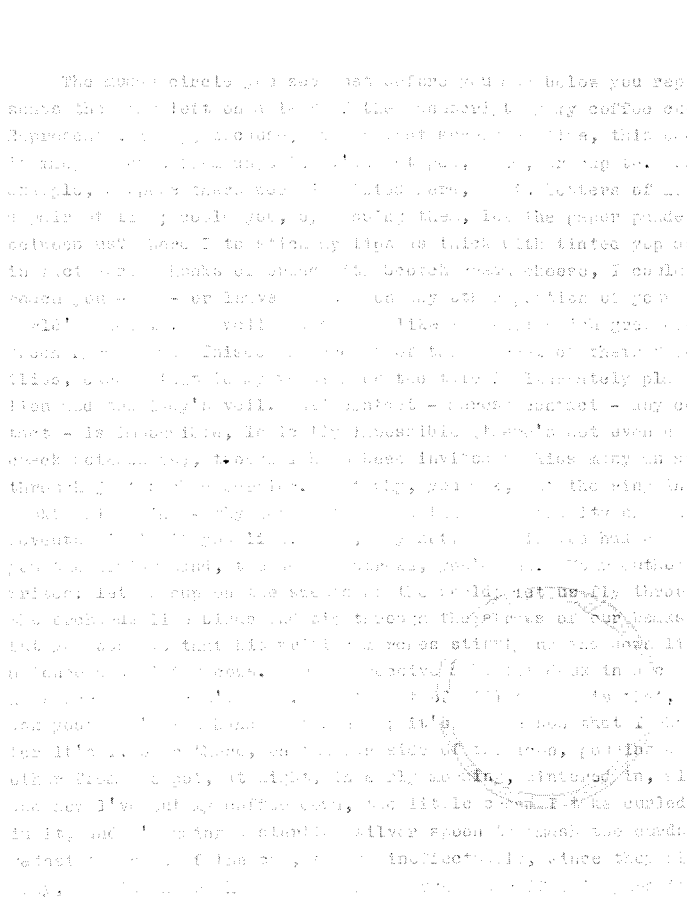

Manuscript pages from *Willie Master's Lonesome Wife* by William Gass.

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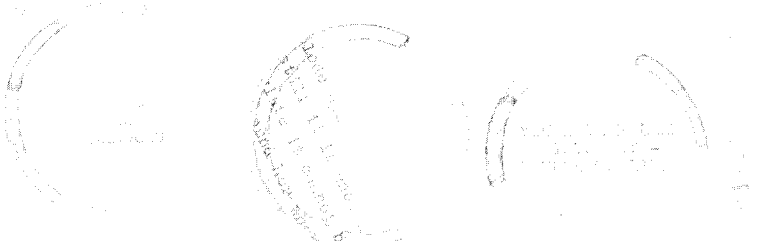

wrote only for herself. I think she should have taken one further step. You don't write *for* anybody. People who send you bills do that. People who want to sell you things so they can send you bills do that. People who want to tell you things so they can sell you things so they can send you bills do that. You are advancing an art—the art. That is what you are trying to do.

INTERVIEWER

How important is it to you to establish some verisimilitude of character to release language?

GASS

Not terribly important. But what you are suggesting is. What I want to do is establish the legitimacy of the verbal source, which is sometimes a character, but it is sometimes a situation or some other kind of excuse. It must seem the right source. You mustn't turn on your tub tap and get crankcase oil. But this has little relationship to how people actually might talk or how oil might actually flow. People tell me that my characters are going crazy, and perhaps they believe that because I don't pay enough attention to verisimilitude. I don't think they are crazy, but the heightened language, the rapid shifts of feeling, the kinds of construction I am fond of —these do make readers think that the mind they are experiencing is not an ordinary one, that the consciousness they've been made conscious of is unusual, and that therefore it must be unhinged, extreme. I have a problem with dialogue because it is difficult for me to envision the total context in which the heightened language I sometimes want to use for conversation is justifiable.

INTERVIEWER

It seems to me that a number of the voices in your fiction are obsessional.

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GASS

That's an impression which may come from my methods of construction. A particular piece is likely to be the exploration of a symbol or a certain set of symbols, and this constrains the text. No meaning can go away without returning. If you're writing an ordinary naturalistic novel, you would be normally interested in the range and extent of experiences and responses and other people. I'm not. You'd want to give the impression of a large world, as if the land was larger than the feet of your fiction. Like Lowry, I want closure, suffocation, the sense that there is nowhere else to go. Also I think the voices tend to reinforce the impression because I often locate the work in a single consciousness. Solipsism is one of the risks of the letter 'I.' If we were really listening in on any person's subconscious talk, it would sound pretty obsessional. One is consumed by one's self.

INTERVIEWER

Is "Icicles" a kind of sport for you? It does create a voice—the real estate salesman—we might hear on TV.

GASS

The central images I wanted to develop led to that—basically the idea of the icicles as a kind of property, then as part of real estate. And pretty soon I was into the real estate business. I couldn't give this language to the main character, but I did want to carry a certain notion of property forward as far as possible. I sort of backed into that, starting—as I usually do—with a concrete symbol that I wanted to explore: what can I do with the image of the icicle. I ended up deep in philosophical materialism.

INTERVIEWER

That is the way a lot of your stories start?

GASS

Almost invariably now. The only story that didn't start

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that way was my first one, "The Pedersen Kid," which had its story line first. All the others have begun with a very concrete everyday image—insects, icicles—or in the case of the novel subordinate suns circling the larger theme of luck—skipping stones, and so on. That's where the unity, if you can find it in my work, comes from. I am exposing a symbolic center. When I think the exposure is complete, I am finished with the story. It's more than peeling a peach.

I used to collect names as possibilities. Certain characters in a sense emerged from their names. I never conceive a character and then seek to christen it. I always have to have the words. I can't even get a story going until I have the title. The title, though, is a direct statement of the central image. If I try to think out in outline some linear structure, then I start pushing my material in that direction like a baby in a pram. When you arrive at your destination, all you still have is a baby in a pram. I want the work to write itself, every passage to emerge from the ones which have come before, so I have to keep looking at what I've done to see what will come out. Usually nothing does and I have to rewrite my beginning until something does suggest itself.

INTERVIEWER

Do some of these images become emblematic for you? Spiders for example.

GASS

Yes, they become a certain kind of emblem. I am very fond of spiders. I am as fond of them as my family allows me to be. I used to have a house out in the country and it sheltered many spiders. Once quite a large handsome spider spun his web in the john where I could conveniently watch him. And of course the family wanted that ughyukky spider removed. I regarded it as a convenient symbol of the imagination: spinning, lying in wait, sucking dry. Maybe my family wanted the imagination removed. But partly I use the spider because, in general, I like insects. I like to watch them operate. I think

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animals have the same fascination, but except for a few household pets, you have to go out to the zoo to see them. You can watch a spider the way you can sometimes watch people on the New York subway. You can inspect them. Raccoons move too much, and are hard to get close to. That's one reason I spend a lot of time examining objects. They hold still. They aren't threatened or embarrassed by your stare. I don't *regard* as much as I once did, but I realized that I was looking for sources of language, and now my source of language is almost always other language instead of things in the world. Words are the supreme objects. They are *minded* things.

INTERVIEWER

You described the most important intellectual experience of your life, seeing Wittgenstein, as almost wholly with content. How important is the notion of activity to you?

GASS

That was Wittenstein's famous definition of philosophy: it was an activity, a certain way of doing which was without end. That notion is very similar to the one Valéry had about poetry. He was interested in the activity of writing, the consciousness in the act of composing, creating, and less so (he said) in the final result—which wasn't for him final, only the sign of an absolute weariness. Well, I'm very interested in the process of course. I can become my subject. But I am interested in the process because of what I want it to lead to—the story, the poem. Perfection. But the process is a great lure and you can postpone failure by dallying along the way like Ulysses. I can hardly get from one sentence to the next.

INTERVIEWER

Is that why you write so slowly?

GASS

I write slowly because I write badly. I have to rewrite every-

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thing many many times just to achieve mediocrity. Time can give you a good critical perspective, and I often have to go slow so that I can look back on what sort of botch of things I made three months ago. Much of the stuff which I will finally publish, with all its flaws, as if it had been dashed off with a felt pen, will have begun eight or more years earlier, and worried and slowly chewed on and left for dead many times in the interim.

INTERVIEWER

You've said that when you first started writing you wrote only sentences. Was this the result of your philosophical skepticism about language or a program of exercises?

GASS

Experiments. I have no skepticism about language. I know it can bamboozle, but I am a believer. No. My experiments were stimulated by my reading of Gertrude Stein. I didn't really get to know her work until I was in graduate school. Talk about having your head tipped. I suddenly realized that I don't know anything about the basic forms that I was supposed to be managing. Nothing. So I studied her very carefully. I am still studying her, and I have always learned a lot. She made me understand how little I knew about what could be done with the basic units of all writing. And she raised philosophical questions about what the basic unit really was, or whether there was one, and about the functions of grammar. In philosophy we were interested in some of the same things then, but we weren't then raising important esthetic issues. Now, every issue is esthetic. I don't know which is worse. But one of the wonderful things about Gertrude is that her repetitions rearrange the esthetic grammar of the sentence and impose this new or special grammar upon the ordinary syntax of English. When I started to examine what she was up to, I realized that I had to begin to get a feel, the way a painter would, of what happens when you try a sentence this way or try it that. To write sentences out of context

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is a fool's business, but I set about doing the fool's business. You can't really talk very sensibly about the content of a sentence out of the context of its use, but you can talk a lot about the form of the sentence and how the forms are interlaced and how they interact within a sentence. I practiced a long time, I mean a long time, writing sentences and connecting sentences and generally fiddling around. I think I learned something. But not enough. I'm still doing it.

INTERVIEWER

How do you define the esthetic difference?

GASS

Much of it is musical, most of it is defined by the gut, and theoretically—well, it gets "defined" by negation. Most sentences are *formed* for the sake of communication. For efficiency, clarity; but rhetorical forms are there for the sake of effect, for persuasion. There are poetic forms too. Of course you end up simply feeling that things are going right or, alas, that they are not.

INTERVIEWER

Does it have to go against the grain to be right for you?

GASS

I don't think so, but it's true that I'm unlikely to trust anything that isn't against the grain. I am unlikely to trust a sentence that comes easily. I should love to be able to write with ease, but I can't, and when I do push ahead or rush on, the result is invariably poor. I have a bad attitude toward things which come easy—wine, women, work, or song—an attitude quite false to the facts, of course.

INTERVIEWER

Two words recur throughout your criticism—"model" and "metaphor". What is their importance to you?

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GASS

I love metaphor the way some people love junk food. I think metaphorically, feel metaphorically, see metaphorically. And if anything in writing comes easily, comes unbidded, often unwanted, it is metaphor. *Like* follows *as* as night the day. Now most of these metaphors are bad and have to be thrown away. Who saves used Kleenex? I never have to say: "What shall I compare this to?" a summer's day? No. I have to beat the comparisons back into the holes they pour from. Some salt is savory. I live in a sea. But that's why I am so lost in the Elizabethans, because they seem to have sunk in the same ocean. What is not metaphorical, is not.

Leave nothing well enough alone is my motto, and I have been studying the phenomenon of language called metaphor since graduate school. Metaphor has been thought to be a pet of language, a peculiar relation between subject and predicate mainly: unhealthy, odd. But you can make metaphors by juxtaposing objects, and in lots of other ways. Suppose the relation between literary language and the world were itself metaphorical? Suppose the relation between language and life is like the relation between the subject and the predicate in a metaphor? If the analogy held, then one might find in it a way to express the relationship between literature and the world which wouldn't be quite so severe as the formalist position I once took required, and yet avoid the imbecility which makes it into some "meaningful" commentary. I've been principally interested in establishing the relationship between fiction and the world. If we can see that relation as a metaphorical one, then we are already several steps in the direction of models. Theory, in science, is frequently conceived as that which flows from a model. Indeed, making the model and constructing the theory are not always two different activities. The kinds of misinterpretation which arouse my wrath—not to say contempt—are paralleled, one finds, by misinterpretations of scientific facts-theories-laws which lead to paradoxes and confusions of every kind.

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INTERVIEWER

If fiction is a metaphor, what is a good metaphor for fiction?

GASS

I have thrown out a number of them and I wouldn't regard any of them as much good. A fiction is certainly not a mirror dawdling down a road. If I could think of a good one, I would put it in a novel. It's not an emotional model of the world—that's too narrow. It's more like a phenomenological model.

INTERVIEWER

A character in *The Tunnel* is writing a limerical history of the world. Why don't you write poetry other than your limericks?

GASS

I can't. I would love to. When I was young I tried, but it was awful. Not just bad, but monumentally so. I tend to use the word "poetry" as a generic term for everything I approve of, but I am unable to manage those narrower forms for any length of time or with any success. I can explore prose sentences and prose paragraph structures. Those can be pretty tight sometimes, and certainly as formal as a poem. But when it comes to the damn poetry itself—well, I don't really know why I am so bad. Maybe I'm just a big dog and need a lot of room to turn around in. I can get away with a limerick because it is a very short form. I can turn out couplets, too, but not enough of them to make a whole poem. I have to be constantly discovering my form while I am working. In poetry, when you write the first two lines you have to have flung out the form fourteen or twenty-five lines ahead of you, but it takes me more than twenty-five lines to find the form I should have flung out ahead of me in the first place.

INTERVIEWER

You mentioned "playing around with form" before. How does that work in, say, "In the Heart of the Heart of the Country"?

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GASS

Suppose somebody says, "Why don't you write a piece of journalism about how it is to live in the Midwest?" It is not an interesting suggestion, and I don't think I am going to do it, but I nevertheless get curious. I take a few notes. I take a lot of notes. The notes are of themselves a kind of form. Here are a lot of little headings: under this, such and such, under that, so and so. Then you begin to see that you've got these little blocks of information, and you start thinking, maybe I could harden these up and move them around. So you start thinking what kind of pattern of presentation would achieve the best effect. It is like establishing a kind of very large sentence. You ask yourself what kind of existing form your notes are closest to. Notes! of course! you cry out. You can hear me, I imagine. And so word resemblance leads you on, not form. So you've really got a musical problem, certain paragraphs you are arranging, and you imagine you are orchestrating the flow of feelings from one thing to another. You want each note to have a certain integrity, but of course you are already thinking of how notes fit together. And you've got this private metaphor of notecard and note in music. Once you get your key signature, the theme inherent in the notes begins to emerge: the relationship between art and life and all that. And the town you've started to describe is called Brookston, but you don't want to call it that, and in a moment the B you've reduced it to is reminding you of Byzantium, which goes with the theme, so you decide to explore Byzantium poems, though with an ironic twist. You start out with "So I have sailed the seas and come . . . to B." Have I really come to be? No. Certain themes are developed that parallel themes in Yeats. The story moves through a series of suggestions, of formal relationships. And eventually what you want to do is take account of the kind of formal relationship that begins to emerge simply from a set of notes—simply from an accumulation of data—from the flow of commentary and the appreciation of a set of poems. For me any piece is a play of various forms against one another. When I am playing with forms, it

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is often simply to find a form for something odd like the garbage. I love lists. They begin with no form at all. . . often, anyway. A list of names is very challenging. There is one right order and the problem is to find it.

INTERVIEWER

You are doing this damn thing on the floor of your study, shuffling and threading these cards—or forms. The reader is reading the story once, ten times, twenty times. He will never catch up with you.

GASS

He doesn't need to. If you convey, in the kind of story I've been going on about, if you convey a certain note-taking quality, a little crude sociology, that's all that's necessary. All these other devices are primarily for the psychological side of the creative process, not for the reader. The reader has to feel a certain set of moves. He doesn't have to know the calculations. Still, if you took the trouble to label the sections of "In the Heart . . . " as you would describe a rhyme scheme, you'd find a pattern. I played with lots of different patterns before I found one that suited me. But what suits ultimately is not the fact that something fits an abstract pattern. You have to feel a resolution and a movement in the fit, otherwise it's no good. Most of these formal tics are private.

INTERVIEWER

Is much of the activity of your writing simply to amuse you or interest you as an exploration with no hope that the reader will catch any of this? Is it necessary for you in order to keep writing?

GASS

"Amuse" may be the wrong word because it hurts so much, but in essence what you are suggesting is correct. Psy-

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chologically these games are necessary. Every writer plays them, though what they are varies a good deal. It is also a protective device which can be dangerous. You may feel that certain things which you have put down on the page are justified because you know how they satisfy your blessed apparatus. That, of course, won't do. I think for most writers there are little private projects which each work undertakes, and that these are best studied by people who are interested in the psychology of the writer. The Homeric parallels in *Ulysses* are of marginal importance to the reading of the work but fundamental to the writing of it. Proust had to be suckered by Bergson. And so on. These beliefs and these forms have to do with the security and insecurity of going forward into the void. Writers have certain compulsions, certain ordering habits, which are a part of the book only in the sense that they make its writing possible. This is a widespread phenomenon. Certain rituals have to be gone through, in cooking, for example, which don't affect the final product at all.

INTERVIEWER

Sometimes a writer, Nabokov for example, will engross the reader in his little games. What then?

GASS

I'm in favor of fun. Nabokov surfaces a lot of his game, however, and forces the reader, or the assiduous commentator, into paper chases. I don't think much of that, though I guess the assiduous commentator gets no quarter. Nabokov wants people to follow his private games with the same kind of interest he takes in them himself. Sometimes the intricacies and the little secrets and the codes really work for the reader; things open up and then it is really quite wonderful. Powerful private symbols are related to this. Lowry, for example, was obsessed with certain things. All great writers are. Lowry put down those obsessions on the page and because they are there, he believes they will have an effect. It is the kind of error the beginning writer makes too—all this stuff

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that is so important to him never really gets to the page at all.

INTERVIEWER

What is a working day like for you?

GASS

Well, we usually get breakfast and the kids off to school by 9 o'clock and I start to work soon after. It's essential that I be in the midst of something, so I try to quit work with new material that now needs revision in the typewriter. In the morning I can start right off working on those revisions and hope that by the end of the day, the process of revising will have sent me forward into some new material. If I get interrupted while I am, in a sense, at the end of something—a sentence, a paragraph, a scene—then I'm liable to have trouble getting back into things. At Yaddo I worked all morning, all afternoon, a great part of the evening, every day. At home I usually work in the morning and for a couple of hours in the afternoon. Lately I have been getting some work done in the evening, but that's because I have not been teaching at all. I haven't been talking about grading papers, preparing lectures, that sort of thing. The real writing process is simply sitting there and typing the same old lines over and over and over and over and sheet after sheet after sheet gets filled with the same shit. And then I discard or abandon material for weeks, months, during which time I start something new. Usually I have a great many projects going at the same time—in the sense that a start of some sort has been made. I get very tense working, so I often have to get up and wander around the house. It is very bad on my stomach. I have to be mad to be working well anyway, and then I am mad about the way things are going on the page in addition. My ulcer flourishes and I have to chew lots of pills. When my work is going well, I am usually sort of sick.

INTERVIEWER

Did Jethro Furber take over *Omensetter's Luck* because of this methodology?

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GASS

He certainly did. Furber went through a lot of midwives being born. When I first wrote the book, Furber wasn't even in it. That was the version that was stolen. Then I rewrote it to get the stolen version back. Furber was still not there. I looked at what my memory had regained from the thief and concluded that the book, although it was now much better than the original, was really no good. It was then that Furber began to emerge. The book began to be the book I should have been writing all along. Now a lot of people find that the Furber section is where the book goes to hell. As far as I am concerned, it is the only justification for that book.

INTERVIEWER

Is Furber the hero of *Omensetter's Luck* because he has the best rhetoric?

GASS

Yes. In my books, if anybody gets to be the hero, he's got the best passages. Hamlet has the best lines. Milton's Satan has the best lines. Furber is what the book turned out eventually to be all about. That's not quite right. It's rhetoric the book is about, and *The Tunnel* is about rhetoric too. It's more completely, more single-mindedly about rhetoric, about the movement of language and the beauty and terror of great speech. Omensetter is certainly not the major figure because he is basically a person without language. He is a wall everybody bounces a ball off. Now anybody who emerges in my work with any strength at all is somebody who has a language and that's why he's there.

INTERVIEWER

Do you like the stories still?

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GASS

As soon as I finish something it's dead, so my writing a preface about it, as I've just done, is very hard. I rarely read things that are in print when I give a reading somewhere. I publish a piece in order to kill it, so that I won't have to fool around with it any longer. The best I can say is that when I have to look back on the stories I am sometimes not too terribly ashamed. *Omensetter's* got more passages which make me blush. There is one story in the collection which still suits me in the sense that when writing it I did fundamentally what I wanted to do. That's "Order of Insects." I think that's the best thing I ever wrote.

INTERVIEWER

How have visual art and music influenced your practice of fiction?

GASS

The kind of aesthetic necessary to comprehend the modern movement in painting up through, let's say, abstract expressionism, is one which I find very congenial. In great part, it preceded the development of a similar kind of theory for literature. I think the impact of formalism, constructivism, and so on, was very great in the visual arts, even though music had been free to go its independent way for some time. Painting, though, had seemed to be about things, had seemed to be mimetic in a basic way, and now it was possible to see how such vulgarizations might be abandoned, and real purity achieved. There were great paintings which didn't get their artistic value from some sort of statement they were making about the world. Then we could begin to wonder whether it was Fra Angelico's piety or his genius as a painter that make his painting so wonderful. For him, of course, piety and painting were one. Not for us, though. There's nothing new about non-representationalism, of course, but it is still very much misunderstood, and very much opposed.

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INTERVIEWER

There's a lot of theorizing now about silence. Are you ever tempted by silence?

GASS

Obviously not. No. I think I am perfectly aware of the dangers and limitations of language. But the people who are talking about language running out as if it were the oil supply, or of reaching beyond language, as if there were a better plate of peaches just beyond the pears—well, that's just cheap romanticism. Beckett likes to work with silences the way a musician works with rests, though he works within a linguistic context, and even if he lowers and restricts his vocabulary, it is all language, nevertheless, and language is all he is basically interested in. Then this glorious emptiness is employed as a romantic cliché by people who persist in using language all the same. They say they are going beyond the limits of language toward something or other and this excuses their execrable style. No matter. They will pass away.

The fact remains that we are moving away, in terms of science and other communications systems, from what one ordinarily calls language. I remain interested in what we are going to use to talk to ourselves with. One of the fundamental problems with film is not simply its easy effects, and its conceptual poverty. That may in time be overcome. Film may be able to carry universals in a useful way. But you can't show films to yourself. There is no way of communicating inside your head but speech. And if you can't talk well to yourself, who can you talk to? You simply aren't anybody. I frequently imagine people who get bored with their own talk, who don't talk to themselves very much. Talk is essential to the human spirit. It *is* the human spirit. Speech. Not silence. That's also Beckett's point.

INTERVIEWER

Does the aggressive motive you mentioned earlier make you a crabby reviewer?

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GASS

I've been crabby about a few books, but I'm not often very mean. In a way I regret the times I have been, because I am rarely angry with the author. Once in a while you run into work which is actually corrupt. But by and large, I get crabby with critics. What happens is that you don't write against the book, whatever it is, but against some asinine prevailing critical climate in which the book appears. All these writers who have been touted as great—it is not their fault that they are just poor writers like the rest of us, trying to do their best, and having the damn bad luck to be praised by fools because they write so badly fools think they understand them. And the clubhouse journalists, the critics, who fall first for traditional kitsch, then experimental kitsch, for the latest French fad, for obfuscation, sensationalism, who are eager to froth at the mouth with the latest rage, with a collection of biases as large as the unemployed, and no standards, no nose for quality . . . well, as you can tell, it makes me mad, and so sometimes I light on the book. Which isn't a bit fair to the author. I've sworn not to do that anymore. Then there are times when I bitch about a biographer because the biographer is not interested in precisely these qualities in the subject which caused, presumably, the biography to be written in the first place. Then there are other problems. How can you write well enough to write about Colette? find the verve required for Henry Miller, the depth for Lowry, or for Borges the proper philosophical wit?

INTERVIEWER

Who are some living novelists you respect?

GASS

Well, the question leaves out so many dead ones who are more alive. I think Barth is one of the great writers. I have admired his work since I first encountered it. I think he is incredible. Several of his books, in particular *The Sot-Weed Factor*, are the works which stand to my generation as *Ulysses*

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did to its. His habits of work are wholly unlike mine, and the kind of thing which engages him is quite different too. He is a great narrator, one of the best who ever plied the pen, as they used to say. He has been accused of being cold, purely mental, but I find him full of passion and excitement. And what I like about his work in great part is the unifying squeeze which that great intellectual grasp of his gives to his work, and the combination of enormous knowledge with fine feeling and artistic pride and energy and total control. I really admire a master. He's one.

A lot of the work of Hawkes is extraordinary, breath-taking. Everybody likes Beckett. Now. It's silly to mention Bellow, Borges, Nabokov—so obvious. And of course Stanley Elkin's work I like enormously. Some of Coover's too, I find extraordinarily interesting. Control again. Gaddis. Control. Also Barthelme—a poet. A great many South American writers write rings around us. Infante's *Three Trapped Tigers* is a great book. I taught *Hopscotch* once. I'll never get over it. Marquez, Fuentes, Lima, Lhosa...It is always an exciting time to be a reader. Lots of European writers are overblown, especially some of the French experimentalists, but Italo Calvino is wonderful. Thomas Bernhard's *The Lime Works* is impressive. In general, I would think that presently prose writers are much in advance of the poets. In the old days, I read more poetry than prose, but now it is in prose where you find things being put together well, where there is great ambition, and equal talent. Poets have gotten so careless, it is a disgrace. You can't pick up a page. All the words slide off.

INTERVIEWER

Have you ever read anything about your work that interested you?

GASS

It all interests me when I start to read it, but soon the critic is explaining to me what I meant, and then I get bored (whether I agree with what's being said or not). I start to skip. But even

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a good critic isn't likely to tell me anything about my work I don't already know, since I'm pretty careful and self-conscious in what I do. I also don't take much pleasure in approval. I have been well treated by critics on the whole. I would like to be deeply pleased by what they say, but my pleasure doesn't last very long. A two second rush of warmth to the head, that's all. I feel a certain sense of relief that I got away with it again—that the critic didn't dislike it. Once in a while a negative criticism will be perceptive. You protect yourself from critics, of course, by anticipating all their censures, so you can say, "Yes, of course, I saw that long ago."

INTERVIEWER

If you were going to write an essay on your own work, what would you concentrate on?

GASS

I think I would immediately start talking about the manipulation of language, and I'd end writing just another essay on style. If I am anything as a writer, that is what I am: a stylist. I am not a writer of short stories or novels or essays or whatever. I am a writer, in general. I am interested in how one writes anything. So if I were to write about my own work, I would write about writing sentences.

INTERVIEWER

Do you teach any creative writing courses?

GASS

I resent spending a lot of time on lousy stuff. If somebody is reading a bad paper in a seminar, it is nevertheless on Plato, and it is Plato we can talk about. Whereas, if somebody is writing about their hunting trip—well—where can one go for salvation or relief? Creative writing teachers, poor souls, must immerse themselves in slop and even take it seriously. Since I can't bear it, resent it, I shouldn't teach it. It is probably impossible to teach anyone to be a good writer. You can teach

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people how to read, possibly.

I am also aware of how little I can tolerate other people telling me how to write. So why should I do it to my students? I do not invite or accept this sort of personal criticism. I usually have poor to absent relations with editors because they have a habit of desiring changes and I resist changes. So why should I tell students to make changes? I also remember how bad I was. I wrote far worse stuff than I see from students. What can I fairly say to them?

INTERVIEWER

You've said no decent sentence could come from a half-formed man.

GASS

I said that? I shouldn't have. Most writers are probably quarter-formed. Hopeless and helpless. One's complete sentences are attempts, as often as not, to complete an incomplete self with words. If you were a fully realized person —whatever the hell that would be—you wouldn't fool around writing books.

—THOMAS LeCLAIR

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Three Poems by Paulé Bartón

The Bowl Seller

I set out a bowl
for the pepper birds.
"Pepper birds,"
I call,
"land in my soup
and make its taste
excellent!"

It's your wood bowl.
These calling words
you gave me
are yours too,
bowl seller.

But is me waiting
all day in the sun.

"There's many things perching
in the sky. Oh many things
perching. But no pepper birds.
They don't come." Those
are my sad
calling words.

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The Bee Dice Game

"He picked up
a bee!"
is what
Belem shouted, high
out loud.

I saw a man crouched
over flowers. He
opened his hand,
slow.
We looked for the bee-sting hole,
but none!
None!

He hushed us. He bent over
flowers again.
He grabbed another bee
and shook it
rattle like dice.

Then he went his way.
I shouted, "I won't forget
you, bee dice man!"

Years I went working
squid bins
and shrimp boats.

One day I went to Iguana Blue Cay
to the bustle market.
There was goings on
by the dice wall.
There was a crowd gathered
whooping.
Four men tossed dice

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I thought.
I walked close.

One man tossed his dice
off the wall.
They were bees!
I promise.

The others tossed
their bee dice.
There was winning
and losing.

I recognized one
then
who was losing
badly.
He was out of practice
I could tell.
He had swollen hands.
They had pollen stain.
He could hardly toss the dice
more.

The Sleep Bus

I get on
the racket bus,
and see one empty seat
next to a burlap-face
mongoose
in a cage.
Next to it I sit on wet mango peels!
then spin
to say
"Who set this?
Who's laughing at my misfortune?"

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I accuse
with my eyes
a baby goat
on the seat behind me.
I glare, he just sleeps goat.

No one on this bus
awake, no animals, no people.
Some damn racket bus!

To the back, shag goat sleeps.
To the front, the driver sleeps.

I want to steal a wallet, but see
the mongoose has none.

I walk home.

—Translated from the Creole
by Howard Norman

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Four Poems by Okhee and Michael Stephens

The Old Woman Recalls the Time around the Last Dynasty and Her Husband's Departure

Before I knew the Japanese
And they would come down on horses
To chop off fingers for practice with their swords,
My husband courted me in the traditional manner
And while bashful sixteen, we were married.
I was loud of voice and sang to him far across the field
Where many apples grew and he went to smoke with the men.
He taught me first to smoke the long brown and gold pipe
While reached almost to the knee,
And once that was done he left me to wonder
Where he had gone.
The Japanese were upon the land
And for years, while first suckling my boy Pyung Hoon
Later weaning him from my nipple,
I thought the Japanese
Had taken husband for torture.
Fortune teller said I must not abandon hope
But soon I found that husband ran off
With *new woman, shin-ya-sung* so called
Because she did not wear traditional hairdo
But had golden high heels.
My son became doctor
Married tall and beautiful woman
(Mother and daughter-in-law should never get along!)
But son went off to war
And each year fortune teller says not to abandon hope.
I drank bottle of poison the night government
Said son was killed of frost bite in northern snow,
Children mopping up what I hoped would kill me.
And each year I visit fortune teller

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To find out when son or husband will come home.
It is eighty years I listen to fortune teller
Say that reunions with lost ones
approach.
Then last week when a summer moon showed itself
The only son of my only son packs for *Ku-ra-pa*
Where he hopes to set up business
And I am here with my old rage and this granddaughter

On the Air

I remember this, I was nine years old. People like my voice. Everyone said I sang well. That afternoon I stole out the door. Through street I walked to radio station. Other children waited with parents. Children waved arms to get attention. All wanted to sing on radio. The man picked me out. He chose other children too. We auditioned. The woman who watched my brother and sister and myself turned on the radio. It is her, your sister, she said. Brother and sister cried. What is she doing on radio? Yes, brother cried, it is her, I know. Yes, the woman said, it is her. Yes, sister said. Mother came home from work and was yelling, She is singing on radio! Who let her sing on radio? Grandmother said, She tells me about singing on radio, I say not to go. She walk out door; she does not come home for supper. It is her singing all right. Our little baby. I remember winning a prize, several prizes. I came home that night a great celebrity in Seoul. . . .

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Lost Objects

My father wore wire-rimmed glasses, the local doctor. It is said I looked like him: full-faced, stocky, broad-shouldered, small-sculpted hands from ancient tribe. I barely remember this: my father put me in an infant seat and rode me around with him on his bicycle. Perhaps visiting patients or relatives. When he died, I had his picture close to me. He wore his glasses; he looked intellectual. After war, we moved and moved. From Taegu to Seoul, from house to house in Seoul, from rooms to rooms. Each time we travel, one less object followed. One object was left behind. I was too young to be sad about lost objects. Later, it is only now I mourn the loss of this photograph, this father. Try to remember, do you remember? I can't remember which house; to remember his face, perhaps I make the details up.

Merle Oberon's Eyes

Call me Toots and offer me chewing gum
My mother is taking my sister and me
To an American movie at the Bijou
My sister hated Lauren Bacall last week
Because her nostrils flared and my sister
Was afraid of those deadly cat-like eyes
Humphrey Bogart was evil but a good actor
And we liked him as the tough guy always
Susan Hayward was sexy and Hollywood
Barbara Stanwyck was sassy and no-nonsense
But today I will see the lovely Oriental eyes
Of Merle Oberon, Asia's wonderful half-sister
And when I dream of her movies
My life is beautiful
I dream of singing on the radio
And my future career at Paramount Studios, U.S.A.

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Two Poems by François Villon

Ballade I

Because I love and gladly serve this woman
must you call me degenerate and a fool?
She has something for the nicest taste
For her love I strap on shield and dagger
When clients come I run and get a pot
And go for wine taking care to be quiet
I offer them water, cheese, bread, and fruit
If they pay well I tell them "*Bene stat*
Stop in again the next time you feel horny
In this whorehouse where we hold our state."

But sometimes there's real ill will
When Margot comes to bed without a cent
Then I can't look at her, I loathe her in my heart
I grab up her dress, petticoat, and jacket
And swear I'll keep them as my cut.

She puts her hands on her hips, "Anti-Christ!"
She cries and swears by the death of Jesus
I'd better not: so, I take a piece a firewood
And write with it across her nose
In this whorehouse where we hold our state.

When we've made peace she lets me
A big fart puffier than a dung-beetle
Laughing she sits her fist on my crown
And calls me her "coco" and whacks my tail
The two of us dead drunk we sleep like a log

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And when we wake and her belly calls
She gets on top so as not to spoil her fruit
I groan underneath pressed flatter than a plank
As she wipes out all the lechery in me
In this whorehouse where we hold our state.

*W*ind, hail, frost, my bread's all baked
I'm a lecher, she's a lecher to match
*L*ike one of us better? We're a pair
*L*ike unto like, bad rat bad cat
*O*n filth we dote, filth is our lot
*N*ow we run from honor and honor runs from us
*I*n this whorehouse where we hold our state.

Ballade II

In smoke of minerals, in arsenic
In orpiment, saltpeter, and quicklime
In boiling lead they should be parboiled
In soot and pitch marinated in lye
Made from the turds and piss of Jews
In old washwater from lepers' legs
In items scraped off feet and shoesoles
In poisonous drugs, in blood of asps
In wolf, fox, and polecat gall
These envious tongues should be fried.

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In the brains of a cat who hates to fish
Black and so old he hasn't a tooth in his gums
Or an old mongrel will do just as well
A mad one, in its slaver and spittle
In the phlegm produced by a coughing mule
Cut into fine bits with sharp scissors
In water where rats poke their snouts and muzzles
Also frogs, toads, and dangerous animals
Snakes, lizards, and similar noble birds
These envious tongues should be fried.

In sublimates too dangerous to touch
In the navel of a living snake
In the blood you see drying in basins
In barbershops when the moon is full
One black, the other greener than chives
In chancres and oozings, in the reeking vats
Where wet-nurses throw diapers to soak
In the bidets used by professionals
(If you don't follow me you haven't been to brothels)
These envious tongues should be fried.

Prince these delectable items should be strained
If you lack bolting-cloth, sack, or collander
Through the brown-stained seat of somebody's drawers
But before this is done, in pig shit
These envious tongues must be fried.

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Portfolio

Maqvillage

Deborah Turbeville

Maquillage represents photographer Deborah Turbeville's vision of an ideal fashion magazine. Miss Turbeville, whose work has appeared widely in the more established representatives of the genre, sets curious and rather private goals for her magazine. She depicts a world that, if not fallen, is precariously poised; it is certainly not fashionable. Rather than gleaming photographs of glamorous, coltish women, accompanied by ebullient text, the magazine presents purposely scarred and distorted pictures of what seem to be female melancholics, accompanied by handwritten shards of suitably vaporous prose. This "copy" that Turbeville has affixed to her pictures are portions of letters she has received from models with whom she has worked. Through all of the quirky text, distorted images and layout, the grace and strength of her photographs endure, as will, one trusts, their inhabitants.

F.H.

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Dearest Debbie

I've been thinking about you, these rainy grey days – last night I dreamt that I fell off the back of a motorcycle ridden by Ava Gallant and snapped my spine – I woke up cramped and yelling at 6 o'clock this morning – strange dame –

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Bob was shocked and upset by Diane Arbus' suicide. I feel that New York is a house of Death— people shatter there so easily— evil gets into the bloodstream — unhappiness is more catching than laughter it all comes so that if there is no laughter at all anymore in a place it swarms and becomes stagnant with hopelessness. I'm so glad I've left. It's a much happier life I'm leading, and much happier people I'm seeing outside in the street

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How are you? I'm in a blue haze at the moment. I'm
feeling sort of efficient and together on the exterior, with all
sorts of little nagging things going on in the interior like I must
o and try to get a passport at the Irish Embassy, and
nd a flat, and then another flat
aking, I'm stay

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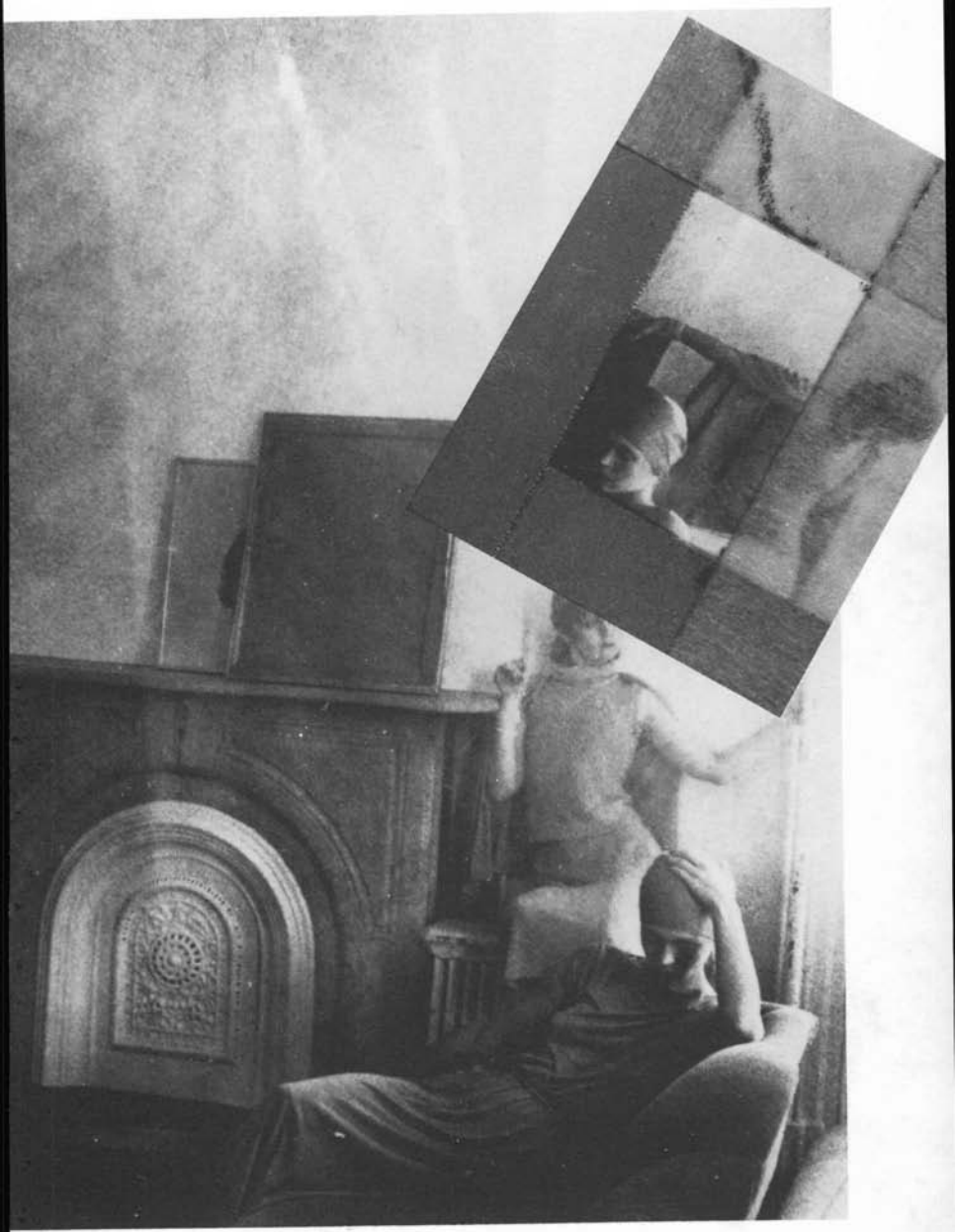

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A Misunderstanding

Carola Dibbell

I wake all night from dreams, delighted by these reprieves against the terrible morning. The waking must be to remind me: Don't forget the children or you shall go mad. Children simply wander through the ordinary dreams. Sam then stirs, says nonsense and I argue back with him for fun. "That's nonsense, Sam," I tell him firmly. It isn't Samuel but Sami Hassan. I've married him because he is Indian and quite wretched, a good boy, whereas I am rotten; though, of course, it isn't true, none of that, I'm simply arch enough to snap, which is the reason for the dreams and they do their job, apparently, for if I'm not mad now, when should I be?

It's black as night when I draw the thin curtain and so cold I want to die at once. Sometimes I've squeezed so tight to keep my warmth in at night that I wake aching in my joints. Twenty-three years old! Next, I must see Sam out of bed or he might stay in all morning and miss work. He promises every day I don't need to see him put his feet on the floor but if I take him at his word he doesn't get up till noon and we

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simply can't afford for him to lose another job or we never shall leave this disgusting city. I set a cup of coffee on the night table and beg Sam to jump out quickly. "Please get up right now."

He stares, rigid. He does not know who I am. I add formally, "This is London and I'm your wife. Get out of bed right now. Please," and I grip his shoulder till he starts to promise, but I haven't the time to listen through: "Please, Sam, please, get up now, I haven't the time." Dazed, he swings his long starved legs to the cold floor and reaches for tobacco and papers, and I leave for school.

He never gets up first, never. He still promises every Friday to shop for me Saturday, but by now I tell him, "Never mind, Sam, you know you won't and I don't really mind as long as I'm not counting on you to do it." But he insists, so I warn him, "Now if you say you'll get up, get up, but don't ask me to wake you. If you can't wake yourself up, only tell me and I'll shop, myself, because I'd rather shop than wake you up, that's no holiday for me." But he does promise and of course he's not up by noon, and the shops close before one, and if we don't shop then, we'll have no food in for the weekend and we can't afford to eat out and would be spending next week's dinner money if we bought from the high-priced, late-closing shops down the road, so I get up and slip out by myself. He's still snoozing when I come back an hour later with a cut in the palm of each hand from my two shopping bags. I wake him neatly with the morning paper, right in the face, and he bounces up like a ball: "What is it? What is it?" he asks.

"What is what? I've just done the shopping."

"Oh, no. Oh, no. I'm sorry, love."

"Don't be sorry. Just don't promise you'll do what you have no intention of doing."

He comes out of bed scrawny and grey in his greying rag of a vest to hold me and say, crooningly, "All right, all right, love, it's all right."

"I know it's all right," I tell him, shaking him off to put

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the groceries away. "You can't help sleeping and I can't help being a bitch, but at least let's admit it."

"No, no," he insists. Elaborately contrite, like some shrewd servant in a comedy, he takes the frypan out of my hand, sits me down full of great spirits and gets breakfast, thinking he'll salvage a shred of my wretched little holiday, but he only spoils the eggs and bacon and crumpets I've been looking forward to all week. I tell him just that, too, I always do, but he goes right on with his little act, as if I were some stock-character virago and he the comic hero, and it's really not fair.

At half past seven I climb through fog to the bus. The sun rises, like blood on the fog, and I think: "The bloodied sky, the sun in its own filthy afterbirth," and that sort of sensationalistic imagery. France won't let us in her market; though we put ourselves on continental time and wake up in the middle of the night to match her business hours, she simply won't have us. Certain headmasters and headmistresses, so reports the *Standard*, are starting classes an hour late to spare their children from early deaths on the dark roads, and for one brilliant instant I'm filled with hope—I could sleep till eight!—but of course, these council-flat types live so close to school they hardly have to cross streets. Poverty excluded, their only real danger is the foul canal some one or two drown in every year; so we teach swimming even before reading as a service to our wretched little community, and I must say it's a pleasure. They warm the pool water and I hold their bare bodies in my bare arms, their hair slick and tight to their little skulls like newborn babies, and I remember all over again what babies they really are, what tiny throats their nasty mews issue from, what tiny bones poke at the fragile stretch of white skin on them, scarcely an armful of child.

I'm a wretched teacher, of course, an idealist, desperate. I mean well enough, but I just miss the point; I have all the philosophy down but none of the plans and no one learns a thing in my shabby class. Not so shabby as it was before I took Mrs. Singh's class, who became ill at half-term. One

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guesses what sort of ill: defeat. Everyone pitied her. No one pities me, which proves they don't shun me from racial prejudice—I married one, but she *is* one yet no one pities me. And it isn't that I wouldn't accept pity. God knows, I beg for it like pasty Glenda who turns my stomach tugging at my skirt all day, though I know she's not any more to blame for whining than Scott Philpott is for sparring on the classroom floor. Why do we forgive the gruff ones who don't need our love, and want to smack right off the face of the earth the ones who need it most?

For example, Gregory. I'd assumed my own experience would lend me special sensitivity to his problems as a colored child, but Gregory doesn't need to be drawn out, far from it: I spend my day reminding him that others, too, need attention or special privileges or toys, and he spends his in tears because he can't have just what he wants. He makes no special fanfare about it, just cries while he plays, or sits numbly in his beautiful white shirt buttoned right up to the collar, but I can't soften to him. His selfishness enrages me and his tears don't make me change my mind, though I shake with shame when his fat, melancholy mother asks me, "He still crying all day?"

"No, no," I say casually, smiling sympathetically at her. "He's doing fine." I rub Gregory's knotty hair and he does a little pleased hop, more fool he, and I'm torn with shame and remorse.

Gregory finds a curious way into my life during a tortured conversation with Sybil, a jet-set English girl who had visited Sam bearing a pipe of hasheesh and a message from his old schoolchum Saadat in Capetown (Sam himself has never seen India, any more than I have). Sybil, chic in an embroidered cape, is obviously appalled at the dark, damp room with its pitiful excuse for a kitchen stuck in the corner, the monstrous furniture, the stained, cracked cups and plates and the bare meal we offer her in them, but, though she's Sam's friend, not mine, he won't put in a word, so it's up to me to make excuses for everything—not our fault, not our wardrobe, not our wretchedness. One thing leads to another, and when I

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run out of furniture I move on into classroom ethics in which, too, I've inherited monstrosities and it's too stuffed and cramped for every need, what one child gets, another loses, take Gregory, and then I can't get off him, for Sam's quiet as death and Sybil seems intrigued. And, though I suspect her apparent interest might be one more version of the English politeness that I shall never truly understand, I'm finally drawn to Sybil since no one's even seemed intrigued by me for such a long time.

"I liked her," I say, pleased, when Sybil's gone. Sam often accuses me of coming between him and his friends.

Sam doesn't answer at once, so I take a little break (gather wool) while he trembles attractively, doubtless preparing a fresh batch of his standard critique, white-English variant. But when he speaks at last it is to say, "How can I ever look at her again?"

That shocks me out of my dreams. Cautiously, still not at all sure I heard him properly, I ask, "What do you mean, love?"

"You know it as well as I what I mean."

It turns out well enough: he'd constructed a fantasy in which Sybil and I have invented a secret code on the spot, meaning Sam by Gregory. I can hardly believe he means this, but perhaps he really is that mad, textbook mad, which comes as something of a relief to learn, if it's true.

He hadn't suspected women before, jealous as he is. It was the men that tortured him, that handful Sam brought in from work or school that kept him grey with rage for days after they sat with us for miserable dinners they were never asked to again, men so unappealing I had to wonder whether Sam hadn't put on an act of jealousy to torture me for real grievances: my insensitivity, inconsideration, selfishness, condescension. In fact, I'm delighted by these false accusations, for they prove I'm not to blame for Sam's moods. "You thought I flirted with Peter?" I would laugh. "But I don't care for Peter. Peter's not my type."

But Sam would only brood. "What is it really, love?" I

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might go on, then lose patience. "Look, if something's on your mind, you tell it to me, otherwise I can't be bothered." When in doubt, Sam stretches his fingers toward the gasfire and stares at them; I pick up a book. Then I'm swept with pity for my husband, who is saying, tightly, "How can I meet this man again?" I must answer blandly, not to raise suspicion: "Very easily, I should think."

Quivering, he goes over old ground: "How can I look at this man's face?"

"Look," I snap, as there's no point conceding it's anything but rubbish, "if you can't look in his rotten face that's your problem. Don't go blaming your inhibitions on me. What shall I do? Go into purdah?" He stares at me intently, then dulls his gaze and drops it to his fingers, which he stretches toward the fire. I go on nastily. "Shall I take a picture of your fingers? Shall I have them cast in bronze?"

He starts up as if woken from sleep and, seeing his own outstretched fingers, clenches them and lays them on his knee. Of course I soften and go kiss his fingers and his eyes as well, saying, "I don't love anyone else. There's no one else but you. Do you believe me?"

He stares as if he has never seen my face before, then smiles briefly and says, "It's all right," though I wonder why he said that and not, "I know," or "I love you, too."

I dream that Sam and I live in my classroom, which has a dirt floor. Sam's been a soldier in the war and, far from the front, heard news of the armistice just after killing an enemy soldier. He killed the soldier thinking it was wartime but war being over he's legally guilty of murder. What shall he do with the corpse? We dig a hole in the dirt floor of the classroom and bury the corpse there but Gary Trower comes in with a pet cat on a leash who runs straight to the spot and starts to sniff and scratch crazily, and I freeze. When I force myself awake Sam is panting in his sleep. I wake him and say, "What is it? What is it?" His eyes are beady; he doesn't know me. He always forgets dreams but this time he remembers: "I dreamed two ferocious beasts were in there—" he

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points to the hulking wardrobe. "A lion, a tiger perhaps, trying to get out. And I was terrified, you see, terrified they would come out and hurt you."

Still shaken, I turn a light on. Then we hear a scream, not in our house but not far off, perhaps a few houses away. We look at each other. "What do you think?" I say.

Sam says, like a fool, "Perhaps it's nothing."

The woman screams again and I get out of bed, Sam crying, "Take care, love, take care!" I knew he would not go himself, he never gets up first, it's always me who starts the fire, gets the paper, keeps him when I can from losing his filthy job, and I'm as cold in the night and morning air as he is, just more disciplined, simply that; so to show what contempt I have for his pretense of concern for me, I part the thin ragged curtains.

It's a terrifying night, cold and black. The trees are in full bloom, still, and the moon's ice-cold and fiercely white; the flowering trees are lit with it. Across the yards I can see the row of neat alike houses, square, chimneypots quaint and black against the sky. There are no lights in any of the houses. There is no more screaming and I don't know what to do. "Can you see?" Sam asks. He's lit a cigarette.

"What do you think it was?" I ask.

He shrugs. "Perhaps a quarrel." I'm shivering and I put on my heavy coat. "Come to bed," he says.

"No," I say, "I don't want to dream again. *You* go to sleep."

"Don't be cold, love," he says.

"Don't worry about *me*," I say. I put on water to boil and find a match for the gas fire. I light the gas and listen to it hiss. I'm still frightened, shaken, chill, sick with the strangeness of the night. By now, it's April, though night and morning and even afternoons are raw and always grey, but it's a time of hope, a moist and growing time, I think. I read a French novel, huddled by the fire, and I get up to make cocoa with the boiled water so the caffeine from tea won't give me hairier dreams. Sam is sleeping, but I can't be both-

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ered to worry about making noise; he'll always be able to drop off again. He cries urgently, waking, "What is it? Are you all right?"

"Of course I am, what did you think?" I snap and then ask myself why I had to snap, why couldn't I just say, "Yes, love. I'm all right. Don't worry, my love."

"Don't catch cold," he murmurs, falling back to sleep.

Still not a sign of spring except the recklessness of flowers and certain modish secretaries in minis and blue knees. Odd to think it was just a year ago that, walking under the leafy trees up and down Holland Park and Notting Hill, I thought, "The streets were lightly sprinkled with sun," or "Up and down the broad quiet streets the dogs were seeing evening in." The raw damp goes directly to my bones if I even cast off my wool vest, but I make Sam take long walks with me on the weekend, all the way into town, where we see a film. In Oxford Circus, we meet Rick, a student we once knew until Sam took it into his head he was my lover. I keep my eyes on my shoes and try not to shake. Sam says to Rick, "You are looking very smart. Don't you think Rick is looking smart?" I smile. "I think he is a very smart man. Are you smart, Rick?" Rick must laugh; I don't look. "I hope you are smart," Sam says. "For your sake."

Rick says, willing to be cheerful still, "I don't think I understand what you mean."

"Oh, I think you do," Sam says, trembling and grey. I tug at his arm to leave. "A smart man like you understands," Sam says, and I tug at him.

"He didn't understand," I tell Sam when we've left.

Sam says, "Believe me, Maia, I know these men, they would sleep with my mother."

"He's a young boy," I say.

"I know these young boys," Sam says. "I was also one. Believe me."

He broods, and I grow delicate: I bring cups of tea and run out for cigarettes and even invite him, once or twice, to bed;

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then I fear my sweetness will feed his suspicions. In any case he doesn't answer. I ask, "What is it? What is it?" I say, "Please tell me. Love? Please, Sam. We'll never work it out if you don't tell me." He clenches his jaw from supper till bed, at times nodding abruptly to himself. I ask nastily, "Are you still obsessed with Rick?"

"Don't play with me, Maia," he flashes, and I feel ashamed and I protest, "I never slept with Rick. I never even wanted to."

"I warn you," he says at once, staring intensely at me. "I will not be played with," and I stop, because of course that's what I've done, answered the question he wasn't asking and left unanswered what he must really mean—though he can't really mean what I fear he does, or why would he stay? If he stays, he must know I love him, as I do, I'm simply a difficult person, irritable and hypercritical, a bully, but I do love Sam, no one's ever cared so much for me, which is why I can put up with his mistakes, which after all are only a matter of culture. How would I feel in his world, after all? It's just that I can't stop insulting him, and who could blame Sam for resenting that? But he must realize that I only dare show him this side of me because I *do* love him, and if I rarely tell him so it's only because I don't trust feelings like that to words, which can distort or even destroy the truest feelings. As soon as I've said, "I love you," I think, "Is that really true?" I only need to say a thing exists for it to disappear. Even at school, the words "my husband" seem to hang in the air after I've spoken them, as if we weren't married at all and these teachers were the landladies and shopkeepers and neighbors I lied to when the ring I wore cost three and six. In fact, I seemed to believe that lie more easily than I do this truth, which might prove that, if lies don't make you guilty, the truth will, later.

Yet, surely, if "my husband" hangs in the air it could as well be the teachers' small-minded prejudice as my odd guilt. I *do* forget that. They are so cold, these English, that one never can be quite sure what has really gone on, and that's how racism works on this dreadful island, perhaps, it simply

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drives the victims mad by never letting on that it does exist. Or do I only wish to blame others for what in my heart I know is my fault? If I were they, what would I think of myself, after all, with my disgusting apologies, my lumpiness, my stinking clothes that I can't afford to clean or even hem properly with no one to help, my annoying questions? "Don't you hate yourself when you have to punish them?" I absurdly ask. They glance uneasily over my shoulder and say, "Oh, well, you have to look out for yourself, don't you," and in fact I have begun to use their tricks, their petty jibes and rewards; but I haven't the skill or conviction to bring that off. I threaten, then forget, protect favorites and let others fend for themselves. Blood spurts, paint spills, books are smeared and puzzle pieces disappear forever. I ignore the meek until nothing's left for them but naughtiness, which I reward with interest; I forgive the bad.

For instance, one day Gary Trower, the wordless sadist whose father beats and mother pets him, gouges Maisie's forehead and I resolve to take some action at last: I drag him to Miss Lewcock's office. I have to pry his tiny fingers from every door on the way. His milk-blue eyes, behind the thick circles of his glasses, are saucer-wide with terror. "I yood!" he bleats, or pipes, or squeaks. It's the first sound to pass from Gary Trower's lips all term and it makes me want to throw up. It sounds like an insect imitating a child. "I yood! I yood!" I consider how terrible his fear must be, to expose this secret voice, and, sickened, bring him back to class instead. He's good.

At last I even turn to crisp Miss Lewcock, the headmistress, for advice. In her cozy office, she tells me, "Oh, it's a fight!" I pause to rephrase my question so that she can in no way believe I don't want real answers; but to explain my pause I murmur, "Yes, I suppose it is," as if the thought had never crossed my mind, and we go on like that for an hour. By then I shake so peculiarly that she, quivering herself, looks ringed in flame like Blake's angels, and I try to leave, but, as I try not to seem ungrateful, my goodbyes invariably turn into

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questions I don't want answers to. I walk right into rush hour, my bus crawls, the shops are closed, and I must trudge way up the hill to get kippers and peas at a price we won't be paying for all week; of course Sam's home and staring at the fire when I finally get in, and my excuses sound so lame I don't believe them myself, though Sam pretends he does.

One grey afternoon in June, Miss Lewcock slips through my classroom door and dead silence falls, though Gregory's the fool enough to keep skipping; she grabs him by the wrist while she approaches with her gay conspiratorial smile. I'm never truly sure which side of the conspiracy I'm meant to be on, but whenever the opportunity rises I laugh like a dimwit to suggest the joke's not on me. "Have you some very naughty boys?" she asks. I haven't a clue what my answer must be. Tears go rolling down Gregory's cheek and even Miss Lewcock's taken aback. "Now, now, there's nothing for you to cry about," she says awkwardly. "Go back to your place." He sits down and continues to cry noiselessly. "Well, well," she resumes. "I understand you've some very naughty boys who don't know how to leave alone what's not theirs to play with."

"*Have* I?" I say archly, trying to pick up the English intonation and shaking from head to foot.

"Some very naughty boys who get into the empty milk containers in the yard and make a dreadful job of it for Mr. Cuddahy, no it's not funny, Scott Philpott, nor you, Jimmy Dawson, and Brian McGuinness, what would your mother think? Do you think she'd be proud? Do you?" Brian's stopped grinning and stares down at his feet. "Do you?"

He whispers, "No, Miss."

"No Miss *Lew*cock," she tells him.

"No Miss *Lew*cock," he whispers.

Scott tries to sneak a smile at him and she cries, "I'm sure you won't think it's so funny, Scott Philpott, when your teacher talks to you about it. Nor does Mr. Cuddahy find it so very funny." I want to give it all up at once, as I always do, I don't know why, when Mr. Cuddahy sends special messages

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to correct us of shoving extra chairs in a corner no one uses or leaving sand under tables or stacks of paper where he wants to sweep. Miss Lewcock nods to me and says, "I'm sure Mrs. Hassan will have something to say about this," and I say, "I certainly will," and I try to look sternly at the three of them. She leaves, and a little murmur starts up again in the room, but I've committed myself in front of everyone; if I don't take some major step they'll never listen to me; I must do it at once though I haven't a clue what it must be. "Scott Philpott," I say, in a loud voice. They all hush. "James Dawson. Brian McGuinness." I'll only have the hush for a moment longer so I say resonantly, "Stand up, the three of you." They do, but they're openly grinning again. Everyone will be shouting in a moment and I've nothing to say, so I repeat, like a fool, "Scott Philpott. James Dawson. Brian McGuinness."

"It's the 'ole gang," cries Scott, and I hesitate for a wondering moment before I let myself laugh, feeling, oh well, they'll see I'm human and respect me the more, and then the class falls apart, Scott spars, and he and Brian tumble to the floor and the whole class seems to spar and scuffle and scream and laugh and I try to outshout them, which you mustn't do, mustn't ever try: "That's enough! That's enough!" but I've lost. "Back in your seats! This minute!" I scream, knowing I've lost. "Scott, Jimmy and Brian, no recess today!"

"We'll play in the room!" Scott shouts.

"You will not, Scott, you'll clean the room!"

"Oh boy!" Jimmy cries, "Can we do the board?"

"Me and Jimmy'll do the board, hey, Jimmy?" pipes little Brian.

"You and Jimmy will sit right down," I say.

"Poo poo poo," he shrieks, and they all break into mean, feverish humiliating laughs and I'm speechless, not that a boy of five should say poo to me but that the look in their eyes is mean and nasty, not young. "Scott!" I scream. "Get off the table!" The bell rings and they surge toward the door.

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"No you don't!" I scream and get there first and hold the knob. "No one's to leave this room until everyone goes out properly! Now get back in your seats! Right this minute or there'll be no recess for anyone, and I mean it! *Gregory*. I said *Gregory!*" I scream. He sits still and cries. "Right. We'll try it *again*. Stand, push your chairs in, I said push your chairs in, Martin Evans, Martin *Evans, Martin Evans!* Sit down again! Brian, Scott and Jimmy you stay in your seats, no, you're not having any recess. MARTIN EVANS!" I scream. "All right you can stay in too!" This hushes them and I say, hoarse, "Right. We'll try it again. *Susan Sawyer.*" She huffs and fusses, hurt, with her plastic pocketbook. "Right. Stand. Push your chairs in. Susan Sawyer what *are* you doing?" Nasty, arms folded, I tap my foot and lie hoarsely, "It's all the same to me if you don't have any recess." I whisper, "Right." Exquisitely controlled and practically inaudible I direct them. "Stand. Push your chairs in. *And* wait." I stare them down. By the time they've moved at last, exhausted, in total silence, to the door there are only a few minutes left to recess. I whisper, "Right. Out you go. *Quietly!*" Flushed, exhausted, sullen or frightened, they file out. They are perfectly behaved for a week.

They come privately to touch me the next day. Karen says, misty, stroking my odd tights with that touch so gentle I'd use any excuse not to move away, "Miss, I wish you was my ma."

"*Do* you," I say, arch as ever but deeply grateful. "And why do you wish I was your ma?"

"Oh, my ma gets so cross."

"But so do I, don't I."

Karen turns to her best friend Susan who's braiding the ends of my hair. "See, din't I *tell* you," she says. "She gets cross just like my ma."

Poor pale John Papadouloupos says, hopefully, "You're such a nice teacher, ain't you? I'm always thinking, what a nice teacher I got, ain't I a lucky boy." When I'm up to my neck in mess and rage John's sure to say, bright and mad,

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"What about me doing some sweeping."

"What about it," I snap.

"I just thought I'd do a bit of sweeping."

"Well, why not."

"Well," after a pause, "here's me doing a bit of sweeping, hey?"

"*I* don't see it," I return.

"Right-O, Miss. Well, here I go."

He always sweeps and has no friends. His first day in school John's eyes were so bright and mad they nearly popped. "Miss," he said. "*I* got new—new trousers."

"Aren't they nice," I said.

"Yes, ain't they. And, Miss," he said.

"Yes, love."

"*I* got new shirt, ain't it nice."

"It's very handsome," I told him, like a fool.

"And—and *I* got new shoes, lookit them, Miss. And—and —*I* think I'm goin' to cry," he said like Christopher Robin, and he did cry, huge round mad tears, poor John, poor, quaking, mad John.

I faint at Mrs. O'Leary's annual tea and I can see everyone guessing I'm pregnant, and though I know I can't be I wish it were true, I wish I had a baby, I wish I didn't have to go to work any more. I see Mrs. O'Leary's eyes when I open mine, staring dead at me. She changes when she sees me conscious, but for a moment, when she takes me out, pours a stiff glass of Remy Martin, sets me down on her sofa, and covers me with a shawl, I feel happier than I have since all the family lived together in the house in Georgetown, when Daddy had his two-year home leaves. I drink brandy, listen to the others eat trifle and pork pie in the next room, and wish this moment would never end.

When I get home, Sam's clenching his jaw as if it were fighting an army down. "I told you I'd be late," I say, gently, and I kiss his cheek but he only nods abruptly to his inner voice, as if my kiss confirmed what it had predicted. Cheer-

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ful, so as not to sound guilty I explain, "I told you Mrs. O'Leary was having some of us to tea." I don't want to say then that I fainted or he would think it was a lie to explain my disheveled air or to distract him from my lateness.

"Look, Maia, I don't care," he says, and I go into a blind white rage at once, but pause till it goes down below my eyes again. He would only blame the rage on guilt. I lay down the packet of groceries I've brought for his dinner and look toward him gently, letting him see how tired I feel so he will know it's only because I do love him that I can bear being so tolerant. "What don't you care about, love?" I say, softly. I wait a moment for his silence. "What don't you care about? Love?" He clenches his jaw and looks raptly at his extended fingers. I know if he speaks at all he will not answer me.

But as I put the kettle on and unpack the groceries, I press him a little, so he won't think I don't care. "Did you think I was with some man." This has a sarcastic edge, which I hasten to soften. "You know I wasn't with a man. Do you believe me, Sam?" My voice expects no answer and Sam, hearing it, stays dull, so I try to get up my spirit. "Do you? Do you believe me? Tell me, love." He clamps his teeth terribly, as if he held a knife between them, but suddenly I really don't care, what does it matter what he says he believes? It will only be some murky lost level of the truth I already know better than he ever will, that if he suspects infidelity he hasn't a clue how much more nastily I could and do insult him, under his own body, with anyone, old lovers, animals, filthy photographs, funny men with naked white legs in shoes and socks who work dirty games between my legs, anyone but Sam, and Sam will never know, so why should I care what Sam believes, for I have nothing to learn, only to teach, and it's a lesson he would live better never learning. And I think, where is my life? Why am I in this frigid city? Why do I let this man who can't get out of bed judge *me*, this man who will never know the truth? I've screamed and thrown my coffee toward him in a flash. He pulls his hands up to his face protectively, terrified, and I get

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a rush of satisfaction, he looks like an insect, an insect deserves this, oh, how could I think that? Horrible! I sob some awful sound like braying or bellowing, play-acting, for I don't truly need to bellow, but the sound I make sounds so real it fills me with pity to watch myself fly across the room and pull at the door till Sam pries me off and forces me to press my face against him, saying urgently, as if it were a question, "Don't weep? Don't weep?"

"I fainted today," I tell him, sobbing, when he lays me on the bed. "No, love?" he says. "No?" then firmly, "No. No," over my pulpy noises, like some steady nurse, as if he weren't sicker than I'll ever be, "You should have told me," as if it were the fainting after all to be pitied, it's just that, without the drama, he'd never have understood so I *do* have to exaggerate, *must* demean myself, even though it wasn't really fair to ask pity for what was in the end a rare taste of peace; I do deserve pity, must, look at my life, I must be miserable enough to deserve pity, I am so miserable, I am so lonely.

II

Sam doesn't write to me in Paris though I send five letters in the fortnight I spend there. Empty, it's so lovely, cool and grey that I don't want to leave, reminded how much of my unhappiness is the wretched sameness of London life, and I walk for hours. Gouged paving stones are neatly piled at corners. Uprooted trees die in the Latin Quarter. Blurred and still uncovered, red letters on a crumbling brick wall under two chestnut trees read, "Vive la Revolution Perpetuelle," and students, sacrificing holidays to make up for studies lost in May, debate with the grace and passion I have missed in London. The men are easier on me than they were when I was single, just a year ago. I look like a middle-aged schoolmarm, dressed to blunt whatever might be gay and graceful in me with my lumpy tan raincoat and my floppy suede walking shoes. But soon, under the city's influence, I'm trying to

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strain a gesture toward prettiness out of the pitiful pieces of clothing I've brought; I tie my hair with a wrinkled blue ribbon, deck my throat with a patterned scarf Daddy bought me long ago. All my clothes seem to be the same color and shape, and my face, however thickly I coat it with cheap English makeup, is equally unremarkable, neither strong nor appealing. I wander through the Jeu de Paumes and remember when, surprised by my reflection in the glass over a Toulouse Lautrec I thought, "and the prettiest of all the pictures here is me." The city is subdued, but every inch of it is steeped in that uncanny loveliness I always fear will have been lost, if only in my ability to see it, in between my rare, precious visits.

I reach Victoria early in the morning and Sam's not waiting. I don't mind. I take the bus back alone, loving the leisure of being a tourist in my own home, a bit high from staying up all night crossing the channel. As I lug my pack down the last stretch of the Gardens I meet Sam looking five years younger with a ridiculous haircut, on his way out to try and find himself a job. "But what happened?" I ask, as we turn back.

"Oh, you know." He shrugs and smiles like a girl, embarrassed.

"No I don't, what happened, love? And why didn't you write, you bastard, I sent you five letters."

"I couldn't," he says. He can't stop smiling. "You know it I couldn't, love." So pleased I want to smack him he says, embarrassed, "I missed you a lot."

"So did I," I tell him. "But what about your job?"

"I'll tell you," he says. I set my pack down and put the kettle up. "I got the sack."

"Oh, no, Sam. What did you do?"

"This bastard John Wilson."

"What did you do, Sam?"

"I missed you very much, love, I can't sleep when you're not with me, you know it, love."

"You came in late?"

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"Yah," he says, laughing all over his face. "I stayed home for two, three days."

Furious because he's laughing I raise my voice. "And you didn't call them?"

"Friday, I came back, I told them, look, my wife is not with me, I can't sleep . . . "

"Why didn't you call them?"

"You know it I couldn't, love." He shrugs and smiles. "It was a bad job."

I can't bear that he smiles as if it were nothing when we've worked so hard and lived so badly to build up enough money to pay his filthy debt and leave England before we die of wretchedness, and that now we'll have to eat into the savings it cost us so much to build, so much work and bad cuts of meat and walking miles to save shillings for cigarettes and putting off the wash till our underwear rotted on us to save the cost of a ticket to the cinema; he smiles as if he'd done something poetic or at least amusing, and I can't bear it; oh I know he must feel sick with guilt and worry himself and that's why he smiles, after all, but I can't help screaming abuse at him, poor wretched Sam, though I know it's only because I'm so mad at myself I'm in such a state. I should have known, after all, he can't take care of himself without me, I knew that, I should have known he'd lose his job or something like that, it's not his fault, he can't be blamed, after all.

I apologize. He says nothing while I make coffee for both of us. His face is in his hands and he looks up, startled and grey, when I set his cup beside him. I give him the American cigarettes I've bought on the boat for him and he smokes half a pack just sitting there without a word. I kiss his cheek when he goes out but he holds himself tight and nods abstractedly.

I lie down on the unmade bed. It's so rare I lie in bed on a weekday. I notice how shabby and filthy everything is in the bright daylight, notice the smell that I hadn't smelled since we first moved in, old spices. I hear the daytime sounds of children upstairs, scuffles and thumps. Light comes through

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all the holes in the thin curtain. It's eleven o'clock, the day is long but ticking itself away, and I don't know what to do with it. My plans are wasted now. Sam will come home before I've done anything, depressed, and I'll have to be gentle or he won't feel confident enough to find a good position. Perhaps that's where I went wrong before; I should give him not a moment's peace until, in sheer exasperation, he storms out and comes back with a job. The ashtray's brimming, dishes are stacked in their own grease in the sink; he's bought nothing but the most expensive brands of eggs, butter and coffee, that dumb aspiring middleclassness of English colonials, nothing but the costliest, whatever the quality. I should have known! I burst into simple tears, then stop and sleep till Sam comes home, and I've screamed myself hoarse before I see how abstracted and vague he is. He huddles before the fireless grate staring at his fingers and I ache with shame. For what had he done that he could have helped doing? Why do I torture him? Who could blame him for staying so silent and closed to me, when this is how I greet his openness?

I try very hard to make it up, harder than ever. All the next day, I'm cheerful and attentive, but Sam, who doesn't go out once I've typed and sent off applications, only sits and broods in his great, rotting armchair, running upstairs in his slippers twice a day when the post comes. He doesn't seem to be angry but simply abstracted.

I feel ashamed to read or write when Sam can't, so I get myself out as often as possible until my holiday ends. I spend an entire afternoon at the public library, choosing with the greatest care my five weekly books. I roam about the big department stores up the hill; or I walk all the way to Gower Street and browse in the book stores. I come home exhausted by decisions not to buy. I find Sam brooding over the cold grate and tell him at once where I've gone and how long every part of it took. I bring books for him from the library and say, "Here's a mystery you might like." He glances at the cover, then lays the book on the table. He studies the paper thoroughly and smokes constantly. I say, "You're

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smoking a lot." He nods, absorbed in the nearby air. I say, as gently as I know how, "You know, you could really use this time to work on your portfolio. It couldn't hurt."

"It's all right, Maia," Sam says, and I'm ashamed of myself for being so obvious.

I am particularly careful to see that there are good things to eat, and since I know his pride is very low now, I do all the shopping, though Sam has nothing to do all day but wait for the post; I start to wonder how good it can be for him anyway that I lean on him so little now, perhaps showing him my own frustration will help him realize I need him, too, so I let myself snap at him and I say, "Can't you do something? You're driving me out of my mind." He looks up, startled, and he picks his paper up again at once and reads it over. His eyes sink away soon but when he sees me watching him he starts and stares hastily at the page again.

At last he says, "Perhaps it is best that we should separate," and I flash back, "You know you can't even live a week without me."

"It is true, perhaps," he says gravely. He looks very handsome, like a young rajah, full of dignity and pride. "It is true I would suffer perhaps more than you. But, Maia, we both know it is not good between us."

I study him in his new stance. He's never said this before, but I don't believe him. If he wants reassurance, why can't he just ask for it instead of forcing me to go along with his little game? "All right," I snap, out of patience, "but since it's your idea, you can be the one to find yourself a new room. I'll stay here—and don't expect any help from me in getting a place, or money."

"I don't, Maia."

"Oh, come off it, you know you can't buy yourself a rotten postage stamp without me telling you how. You know it, Sam. You just want me to say I can't live without you, and for all we know, that may be true, but that's no way to cure our problems; separation never cured any marriage; it just creates false illusions of how much you need each other, a

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sentimental reunion and then there you are back where you started, and all that money wasted by two rents that might have made the difference in smoothing the problems out in the first place,'' but I've gone too far again and undone everything. Why do I need to prove I can always win when I always can, and my only prize is the wreck I make Sam into, grey, old, huddled over the cheerless grate, poor Sam.

For a day, he's so wretched I can hardly bear the sight of him, though I'm full of conversation and take his side. ''Those bastards take their time,'' I tell him, after the post.

Sam looks up from the grate and says, ''What is it, love?'' In a day, he says again, ''Maia, we must separate.'' By now I can't think what to answer. For I know he's right. I don't know who else would have put up with me for so long, still less who would put up with me now.

I climb on his lap and say, ''I love you, Sam,'' and I believe myself this time.

''I know it, love,'' Sam says. I hide my face in his neck, and he rocks me, humming some old tune of his. We are more at peace than we have ever been before.

''Sam,'' I say suddenly, ''I don't want to live without you.'' I realize this changes everything. ''Sam? I think I could change. I could, Sam.''

''I think it too, love.''

''Sam?''

''But we must separate, if only for a while.''

I know he's right. I've stayed a child too long; Sam has given me the chance to find the woman in myself whom I recognize in a way I never have this thrower of tantrums, this terrible abuser of a gentle man, and I'm terrified that Sam will treat me as I only deserve. ''Sam,'' I ask, ''do you want to be together in the end? Because if you don't, I don't think I can do it,'' and saying it that simply makes me cry, as if out of pity. Sam stiffens at once and holds my face to see my tears; I turn, trying desperately not to use the one argument that never fails, but Sam is already saying, ''Don't weep? No?''

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"I don't want to live alone," I sob.

"I wouldn't leave you, no, don't weep," he croons. But in the evening, he tells me, "We must separate, Maia."

In the end I say, "If you feel we have to, then I suppose there's nothing more to say." At once everything is clear to me. I put on my nightgown and climb into bed. Sam asks if I'm all right and I say, "Yes," face the wall and pretend to sleep. After a while Sam joins me and turns the light out.

Tomorrow he will catch an early train, for his interview. When he's gone, I'll get out of bed, close the window, turn the gas on, then get back under the covers and try to sleep. Sam will come home in the afternoon and find me dead; I wouldn't know how to live without him any more, I'd come unstrung completely.

Sarah Overton will take my class. The problem is Sam. He'll surely lose any job possibilities, and the room soon after, no doubt. What will he ever do about my body?—who can barely follow a shopping list. They must do something. Survivors are always distraught, and bodies are always disposed of. Perhaps they do the notifying, as well. Sam will never manage a letter—the thought of Daddy makes my eyes and throat swell up. What a disappointment to him, poor old man. Panicky tears immediately slide to the pillow but I hold my breath: it isn't fair to sway Sam this way, he'll have no choice. But he whispers, "Love? My love?" He feels my cheeks in the dark, as I feared he would, says his "No?" and turns me to him. I try to say, "I'm all right," but I can't help ending on a sob, it's such a pitiful lie. "No, no, we would stay together, don't weep," he says. I do try to resist, but I keep blubbering, and he says, firmly, "It would be all right. We would stay together. Don't weep, no." He presses me so tightly in his arms that my tears stop at once, though this creates a new dilemma, for he wants to go on giving comfort and I've stopped needing it but must pretend I still do, for Sam's sake.

I wake at noon to stare wonderingly at my hands and feet, that would have been dead flesh long since. Sam comes home

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grey and tight in the face. He says, "I never know what is in your mind," but I'm prepared.

"I love you," I say. "I wouldn't know how to live without you. It's true." He won't believe me, but it's true anyway, and perhaps if I simply repeat it, day after day, he'll believe it in time. I've tried everything else.

III

Sam finds a job in a small studio for eleven pounds. I try to encourage him to think about the opportunities for advancement, but he says, bitterly, they try to keep him down and save the better places for Englishmen. "Are you sure it's because you're not English?" I ask cautiously, and he says, "Believe me, Maia, I know these bastards."

School starts. Gregory shows up one morning in blue-rimmed glasses and becomes a good boy at once. Like all the other boys, he says, "Mees, I wants to be your *husb*rind."

"Do you," I say archly, "but what shall I do with the one I have now?"

"Oh, I cut off hees haed."

I shake all day long. It doesn't matter. The kids learn to read, whatever I do, as if it were a biological, not a social necessity. In the evenings, Sam's still looking grey. He looks up from the fire occasionally to say things like, "You tell me this. Why do you weep when I want to separate?"

I answer as simply as I can. "Because I want to stay with you." I wait for him to ask me why. I'll answer, "Because I love you."

"I never know what is in your mind," he says.

"I always tell you," I say, gently, smiling and shaking my head.

Because of his job, I don't feel ashamed to read and putter about while he stares at his fingers, and I even tease him. "What a delicious dinner," I say out loud as I take it off the stove. "Yes, it *is* good, isn't it?" I return. I go on, "How was your day in school? Lovely. Thank you for asking." Sam,

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eating, nods silently, almost politely, but so vaguely it is impossible to imagine irony. "Sam," I say and leave my plate, climb into his lap and take his face in my hands. Sam takes my hands down firmly, still looking absent-minded. "Sam, what is it?" I ask. "What is it? What is it? What is it?" I've begun to smack his face and for a moment he's terrified; then he grabs my hands and trys to comfort me, but I scream, "No, you *tell* me!"

"No, my love?" he says, to soothe me.

I quiet down, but this time I don't cry. I say, "I mean it, Sam. You don't do this to me any more."

And it does seem to perk him up, for soon after, he looks up with a flourish and asks, "Do you know what I am thinking? I am thinking, suppose you did not weep."

I snap, in spite of myself, "Next time I'll try not to and we'll see what happens." I have never told him of my plans for the gasfire; he wouldn't have believed me. But now I've lost him again. He stares at me, rises, buttons his coat and strides to the door, where he pauses. Must I try to stop him? —I venture, "Don't be long." He laughs and goes out. I clear the table calmly and talk to myself. "Do you miss him? No, not really, isn't it odd. How can that be? Well, a little peace is never unwelcome. But you love him? Yes, naturally, but if truth be known I find the whole business overrated. Love you mean. Love, yes. Well, you could have something there. Well, I do." Then I chat. "Shall I help you with the washing up? That would be kind. I'll start the kettle, shall I? Thanks. You're really quite attractive, you know. Watch yourself, sir. No reason to take it like that. No reason to take it at all, is there?" I go on washing. "I'm sorry. Yes, let's not bother with that rubbish, shall we, I get enough of it from my husband. Husband? Yes, didn't you know? What is he, Pakeestawni? More or less, your universal coloured immigrant. It must be fascinating well it's not and if you can't restrain your native racism perhaps you'd better hold your tongue, I'd rather hold yours, get out! Filthy scum! Oh come now, I will not! Get your filthy hands off me! What is it like,

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let go! let go! to go to bed with a black man? Sam! Is it like this? Sam! Sam! Sam!" (I stop to recover.) "That's rather touching, you know. Oh, God. It is, you know; cigarette? No? No smile at all? I *am* sorry, you know, love. I don't know why I got so free with my hands there, but you *are* rather fetching, you know. You do have something, don't you? Well, shall we part friends? I won't lay a finger on you. Not a word? Not one itty bitty insult while you still got the chance? Forget it," I sneer, sit down abruptly, and read.

When Sam returns, I tell him, truthfully, "I just talked to myself."

Sam says, "I bought you something," and throws a packet of mixed nuts on the table, half a crown's worth.

I climb on his bony knees. "Thank you, my love. You're my good love, aren't you," I say.

He looks away, embarrassed, happy. "Don't talk shit," he says. His spirits are clearly improved.

One evening, I notice Sam clenching his jaw so hard that I must draw him out, and at last he reveals, "I saw Rick." Startled, as he hasn't been over that for months, I probe him gingerly. "You see, we spoke of our vacations," Sam says. He takes his time tapping and lighting a cigarette. "He took his in Paris."

I get right to the point. "I never slept with Rick."

"Do you see? How can I look at these men?"

I say, tightly, "Is it someone else, too?"

He flashes back, "Did I say that? Or did you?"

If I don't lose patience right now we'll be at it all night, so I shout as loudly as I can, "Sam what have I *done*?" When he shrinks a little, I try to get in and reason. "Look, I'm only being polite to these men. You bring men here, then you don't say a word. Should I ignore them?" Yet, curiously, as I say this, it occurs to me that I have no qualms ignoring Sam; I've never seen the issue in quite this light before. "Maybe I should," I reflect, brightly.

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Sam stares at me. "That is not what you were thinking," he says.

I catch myself before "It *is*" can break out—protesting would only weaken my credibility—and am about to reply more calmly when, as if in mid-jump, I find myself reversing again, for I remember with the sting of injustice that it's always me who's understanding, so I scream, "What do you want?" Sam doesn't flinch, though.

"Don't you see," I go on, "I'm conceding. What else do you want? I just can't go on defending myself any longer." I begin to like this speech. I've raised my voice. "I haven't got the time, Sam. I work all day keeping thirty-five working-class kids from destroying each other and myself and by the time I come home I haven't got the strength to keep proving the purity of my intentions." I scream, "But I'm not lying!" though protesting will only confirm his suspicions; and I wonder why I protested at all. Could he have never really thought I had a lover, but, as I always suspected, meant something else? Something worse. I had better find out now. "Sam," I ask, full of dread. "Whatever it is you say I do: how long have I done it?"

He says at last, "Right from the beginning," and suddenly I know exactly what he means.

I whisper, "You mean Julian." Sam laughs contemptuously. "You do mean Julian," I repeat, hesitantly; who else could it be? For Julian, a lonely Australian we shared a wretched flat with our first month together, had made a drunken grab at me, and I had confessed it to Sam. But Sam only laughs, and I finally turn desperate; I'm so close to finding out. "Who? Who? Ari? Suhaib? Carol? Oh, tell me, Sam! Please!"

And he finally does relent and say, "That Englishman."

"Ian," I realize, vastly relieved. Sam watches me slyly, so I know that this is really who he's meant, all along. "But I never cared for him at all." And that's true. I liked him less than many others, Rick, for instance. But Sam keeps laughing, silently, and this drives me mad. "But Sam," I plead, "don't you remember? He had a girlfriend. I barely knew

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him. I only talked to him that once, when he borrowed a shilling for the gas meter.'' Sam had come home to find this Ian, a carpenter, standing in the doorway of that tiny room in Shepherd's Bush, refusing to come in, unable to leave; he told me he had had a nervous breakdown, and I must have pitied him, that was all. Perhaps it flattered me to see how badly he needed my smile. Perhaps, in my own weakness, it was the only way I could feel a power I haven't ever earned. And, swept with shame, I start to wonder if this is what Sam has meant, all along. I thought he simply didn't know the difference between sympathy and sex, being inexperienced in Western ways. I thought he didn't understand the difference between my kindness to strangers and my kindness to him, but this makes more sense, really, for I know that in his heart, he's kind, too. And it fits with other things, too: it explains, ''You must understand, it is not jealous.'' Sam hasn't been speaking of infidelity, all this time, but sickness, which makes him not jealous but ashamed. I climb in his lap and put my arms around his neck, deeply grateful to Sam who has kept his secret for so long, and with such astonishing patience, until I could understand it, myself, and I begin to sob, ''I won't see men, never, you were right,'' hearing my voice with pity but with envy, too.

But Sam, roused by my tears, stiffens, alarmed. He cries urgently, ''No? Don't weep?'' Then he croons, ''No, love. No. I don't ask that.''

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John C. Witte

Chasing Hamlet

All night rooting, Hamlet squeezed loose,
a secret pinkness under the wall,
your pet piglet
feeling himself round and free in the city.
He'd made it.
Streetlights reddened his tiny eyes.
White clouds hooted from his nostrils.
He sprinted up and down the sweet garbage rows.

You weren't worried. You said
pigs are among the cleverest creatures we know:
whales descend from pigs.
I imagined Hamlet bobbing on the ocean,
in the sunshine growing huge and thoughtful.
We searched all morning in the park,
shattering the frosted shadows of trees.
Now he seems like part of our love getting away.

We found the women hurling their groceries
over their heads, on Main Street, Hamlet
squirting out from under parked cars,
his tail curled tightly behind.
Children shrieked happily.
Policemen toddled on their knees, pleading,
plunking their nightsticks.
A store window had broken, blanketing
the sidewalk. A firetruck came
and backed over a streetsign.

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Everyone pointed, Hamlet skidding
down Pearl Street by the river.
I don't believe he swam for it,
smoothly cutting through the slushy Kennebec
and across Casco Bay into the open Atlantic.
I think he went to the dump
with its enormous seagulls turning overhead
and waited for the town dogs.

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A Moment of True Feeling

Peter Handke

Who has ever dreamed that he has become a murderer and from then on has only been carrying on with his usual life for the sake of appearances? At that time, which is still going on, Gregor Keuschnig had been living in Paris for some months, serving as press attaché at the Austrian embassy. He, his wife, and their four-year-old daughter Agnes occupied a dark apartment in the 16th arrondissement. The building, which dated from the turn of the century and reflected the bourgeois comfort of the period, had a stone balcony on the second floor and a cast-iron balcony on the fifth floor. It was situated, side by side with similar apartment houses, on a quiet boulevard sloping gently downward to the Porte d'Auteuil, one of the western exits from the city. Every five minutes or so, in the daytime hours, the glasses and dishes in the dining-room cupboard rattled when a train passed in the railroad cut that ran parallel to the boulevard, carrying passengers from the periphery of Paris to the Gare Saint-Lazare in the center of the city, where if they wished they could change to trains that

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would take them northwestward to the Channel, to Deauville or Le Havre, for instance. (Some of the older people in this neighborhood, which as late as a hundred years ago consisted partly of vineyards, chose this mode of travel when they went to the seaside with their dogs for the weekend.) But after nine o'clock at night the trains stopped running, and then it was so quiet on the boulevard that the leaves of the plane trees outside the windows could be heard rustling from time to time in the breeze that is frequent in Auteuil. On such a night at the end of July, Gregor Keuschnig had a long dream, which began with his having killed someone.

All at once he had ceased to belong. He tried to change, as an applicant for a job undertakes to change; but for fear of being found out he had to go on living exactly as before and, above all, remain exactly as he had been. Even to sit down as usual to a meal with other people was to dissemble; and if he suddenly began to talk so much about himself and his "past life," it was only to divert attention from himself. Oh, the disgrace to my parents, he thought, while the victim, an old woman, lay in an inadequately buried wooden box: a murderer in the family! But what oppressed him most was that he had become someone else, yet had to keep behaving as if he were still himself. The dream ended with a passerby opening the wooden box, which in the meantime seemed to have moved to the sidewalk outside his house.

Formerly when Keuschnig found something unbearable, he had tended to lie down somewhere by himself and go to sleep. This night the opposite happened: his dream was so intolerable that he woke up. But waking was as impossible as sleeping—only more absurd, more tedious, as though he had begun an endless term of imprisonment. Something had been done that could never be undone. He folded his hands under his head, but this habitual action had no remedial effect. Dead calm outside his bedroom window; and when after a long while a branch of the evergreen tree in the courtyard stirred, he had the impression that it had been moved, not by a gust of wind, but by the accumulated inner tension of

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the branch itself. It occurred to Keuschnig that there were six more stories above his ground-floor apartment, one on top of another!—probably packed full of heavy furniture, of dark-stained cupboards. He did not remove his hands from under his head, but only puffed up his cheeks as though for self-protection. He tried to imagine how his life would go on. Because everything had lost its validity, he could imagine nothing. He rolled up in a ball and tried to get back to sleep. Falling asleep had ceased to be possible. When finally, with the passing of the first train at about six, the water glass on the bedside table tinkled, he mechanically got out of bed.

Keuschnig's apartment was large and intricate. In it two people could take different itineraries and suddenly meet. The long hallway seemed to stop at a wall, but then after a bend it continued on—you wondered if you were still in the same apartment—to the back room, where his wife sometimes did her homework for her audio-visual French course and stayed the night when, as she said, she was too tired to face the spooky corridor with its abrupt twists and turns. The apartment was so intricate that, though the child couldn't actually get lost, they were forever calling: "Where are you?" The child's room could be entered from three sides: from the hallway, from the back room, which his wife called her "study," and from the "parents' bedroom," so called only in the presence of visitors they didn't know very well. The "front" of the apartment consisted of the dining room, the kitchen, the "servants' entrance"—they had no servants—and a special servants' toilet (the bolt of which, strange to say, was *outside* the door), and directly on the street, the two "salons," which his wife spoke of as *"livings,"* while in the lease one of them was termed "library" because of a niche in the wall. The small vestibule opening out on the street was called *"antichambre"* in the lease. The rent came to three thousand francs a month, the sole income of an elderly Frenchwoman, whose husband had once owned plantations in Indochina. Two thirds of this sum was paid by the Austrian Foreign Ministry.

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Keuschnig looked at his sleeping wife through the half-open door to the back room. He wished that the moment she woke up she would ask him what he was thinking about. He would reply: "I'm looking for a way of thinking you out of my life." Suddenly he wished he would never see her or hear of her again. He wished she would be shipped away somewhere. Her eyes were closed; from time to time her wrinkled lids stretched smooth. That told him she was beginning to wake up. Now and then there were gurglings from her belly; the chirping of two sparrows outside the window, a remark, then an answer, always a few notes higher; separate sounds became distinguishable in what had been the even murmur of the city during the night. There was already traffic enough that the screeching of brakes could be heard and farther away the blowing of a horn. His wife still had her earphones on, and a language record was still turning on the record player. He switched off the machine and she opened her eyes. With open eyes she looked younger. Her name was Stefanie, and only yesterday she had aroused feelings in him, at least occasionally. Why didn't she notice anything peculiar about him? "You're already dressed," she said, and took off the earphones. In that moment he felt capable of kneeling down and telling her everything, everything. Where should he begin? Once or twice in the past he had placed his thumb on her throat, not as a threat but as one kind of contact among many others. Only if she were dead, he thought, would I be able to feel something for her again. Standing still and straight, he turned his head to one side as in a rogues' gallery photograph, and said only, as though repeating something he had often said before: "You don't mean a thing to me. The thought of growing old with you is more than I can bear. Your mere existence drives me to despair." "That rhymes," she said. True enough. His last two sentences rhymed—he hadn't noticed it in time—and therefore couldn't be taken seriously. Closing her eyes, she asked: "What's the weather like today?" and he replied, without looking out: "High clouds." She smiled and dropped off to sleep. I'm coming

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away empty-handed, he thought. Strange. Everything he did struck him as strange that morning.

In the child's room he felt as though he were taking leave of something; not only of the child, but of the kind of life that had been right for him up until then. Now no kind of life was right for him. He stood there amid the scattered toys, and suddenly in his helplessness one of his knees gave way. He crouched down. I have to busy myself with something, he thought, already exhausted by the short time spent without imagination, and busied himself putting the laces, which the child had taken out of her shoes the night before, back in again. As Agnes slept, he could see nothing of her face; her hair had tumbled over it. He put his hand on her back to see how she was breathing. She was breathing so peacefully and smelled so warm that he remembered certain of the old days when everything seemed to be gathered under a wide dome and to belong together, when for instance he had involuntarily said "Agnes" to his wife and involuntarily said "Stefanie" to Agnes. Now that was gone; he couldn't even remember it any longer. When Keuschnig stood up, he had the feeling that his brain was gradually cooling. He pulled down the skin of his forehead and closed his eyes firmly, as though that might warm his insensible brain. From today on, he thought, I shall be leading a double life. No, no life at all: neither my usual life nor a new one, for I shall only be pretending to live my usual life, and my new life will consist solely in pretending to live as usual. I no longer feel in place here, but I can't conceive of being in place anywhere else; I can't conceive of continuing to live as I've lived up until now, but no more can I conceive of living as someone else lived or lives. The thought of living like a Buddhist monk, a pioneer, a philanthropist, a desperado, doesn't repel me, I merely find it unthinkable. I can't live *like* anybody; at the most I can go on living "like myself." —Suddenly, at this thought, Keuschnig was unable to breathe. In the next moment he felt as though he were bursting out of his skin and a lump of flesh and sinew lay wet and heavy on the carpet. As if he had soiled

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the child's room merely by his thought, he hurried out.

Look neither to the left nor to the right, he thought as he went down the hallway. "Eyes front!" he said aloud. He looked at the red sofa in the one living room; a child's book lay open on it: blatant disorder. Nothing was alien to him, everything repelled him. He closed the book and put it on the table in such a way that its edges lay parallel to the edges of the table. Then he picked up a thread from the carpet and carried it the whole length of the hallway to the trash basket in the kitchen. While doing all this, he made a frantic effort to think in complete sentences.

With a stupid look on his face, he stepped out of the dark apartment into the street. How mercilessly bright it was outside! I might just as well be naked, he thought, but a moment later looked down to make sure he had pulled up the zipper on his trousers, and at the same time fiddled with it discreetly. He mustn't show that anything was wrong. Come to think of it, had he brushed his teeth? In the gutter on the other side of the boulevard, the water sparkled as it flowed down to the Porte d'Auteuil. For a few minutes that took the stupid look off his face. The cobblestones under the water were bleached white. As he walked, Keuschnig suddenly saw a sunken lane not far from his native village. There were thin, wet-black blueberry roots along the side walls, where as a child he had often dug clay for marbles or projectiles. Lucky that rhyme cropped up when I was talking to Stefanie, he thought; otherwise, I'd already have given myself away. He pulled his cuffs out from under the sleeves of his jacket and for the first time that day became slightly curious. Keuschnig had always been curious, though he disliked involving himself in things. What would be the end of all this? Ordinarily he took the Métro at the PORTE D'AUTEUIL, changed at LA MOTTE-PICQUET-GRENELLE and got out at LATOUR-MAUBOURG, not far from the Place des Invalides in the 7th arrondissement, on the rue Fabert side of which the three-story mansion housing the Austrian embassy was situated. But that day he wanted to walk a bit. He would allow himself this little detour—maybe, in the course of it,

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something would turn up. He decided to take the Pont Mirabeau across the Seine and follow the Quais to the Invalides. On the way perhaps he would think up a system by which to deal with the neither/nor in his head. That's it, he thought, a system!, and in passing looked at himself in the mirror outside a bakery on the rue d'Auteuil. Nothing unusual in his appearance. For a moment he tensed with curiosity.

On the rue Mirabeau, Keuschnig, who as a press attaché had learned to pick such words as *Autriche* or *autrichien* out of any newspaper at a glance, as though they were his own name, saw, out of the corner of his eye, a plaque with the word *autrichien* on it affixed to the wall of a house. It had been put there in memory of an Austrian who had joined a French Resistance group to fight the National Socialists, and had been shot down by the Germans on this spot some thirty years before. The plaque had been cleaned in preparation for the fourteenth of July, the French national holiday, and a tin can with a sprig of evergreen in it had been placed under it. The asshole, thought Keuschnig, and kicked the tin box, but stopped it when it kept on rolling. He crossed the Avenue de Versailles and saw on a hoarding a poster advertising a meeting: "Hortensia Allende will speak to us . . . " TO US! he thought, turned away and spat. Rabble! Passing a newspaper stand, where the only morning paper on display was the five o'clock edition of *Le Figaro*, he read that the Turkish invaders of Cyprus had entered Nikosia, the capital, and that war was imminent. How annoying, thought Keuschnig; what intolerable interference in my life! A couple, arm in arm, were coming toward him on the bridge. The woman was biting chunks off a long loaf of bread, as though such a war were quite out of the question, and that reassured him. But why was the man so tall? Disgusting to be so tall. And to think of him squirting his ridiculous sperm into the pathetic belly of this boring woman! He stopped walking in the middle of the bridge and looked down at the Seine. "*Sous le pont Mirabeau coule la Seine et nos amours.*" A poster advertised the high-rise apartments on the opposite bank with the words: "Seen

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from the Pont Mirabeau, Paris is a poem.'' Poetry gone sour! The river was brown as usual and flowed as usual toward the western hills, where the morning light moved the suburb of Meudon closer. To Keuschnig everything was equally far away and equally unreal: the sand pile on the left bank, the hills of Meudon and Saint-Cloud, the tips of his shoes. It was as though his glance, before it could take anything in, had been blunted by an invisible barrier; it could reach nothing, and he felt no desire to reach anything. He saw no friendly sight, saw only as a whipped man might have seen, and thought: I'd better go right down into the Métro, where a blank look attracts no attention. He took the train at JAVEL, and shortly after seven, unchanged except that the absence of prospects had put him in a bad humor, stepped into the Austrian embassy.

Keuschnig had an office on the second floor of the embassy building, with a chestnut tree outside his window. His work consisted chiefly of reading French newspapers and periodicals, marking articles or news items that related to Austria, when possible providing the ambassador with a daily digest, and twice a month sending the Foreign Ministry in Vienna a report on the image of Austria reflected in the French mass media. In drawing up these reports, he was expected to follow new guidelines, which specified that the images of Austria presented in the French press were in every case to be measured against an ideal image elaborated at the Ministry. Above all, Austria must be seen as something more than the land of Lippizaners and skiers. Whenever the traditional image made its appearance in the press or on television, Keuschnig was obliged to write letters of protest and rectification. He had pasted a model of such a letter over his desk. Last year, it pointed out among other things, the *Financial Times* had awarded Austria an Economic Oscar as the industrial country with the most favorable economic statistics. Keuschnig seldom received answers to these letters, and even more rarely to his reports to the Foreign Ministry. Occasionally he attended ''working luncheons'' at which French political figures met

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with the press, and for which he had to pay in advance. From time to time he received journalists at home, and itemized his expenses, for such receptions were regarded as part of his job. "Seated entertainment" meant dinner; "standing entertainment" consisted only of drinks or, in a pinch, of cold buffet. This, more or less, was his work, and thus far he had done it so seriously as to give no one else reason to smile. He himself had no image of his native land, and was glad there were guidelines to follow. He was seldom at a loss for an answer, except when letters came from children wishing to know something about Austria. But most of the questions in these letters had been dictated by grownups anyway.

That morning a small truck finally arrived with the Austrian silent films, which Keuschnig had loaned the Cinémathèque some months ago for a series of showings at the Palais Chaillot, and the return of which he had requested a number of times. In the court of the embassy, ignoring the driver's impatience, he checked every single reel against his list. No one seemed to notice that anything was wrong. Besides, there was hardly anyone in the building. Because of his newspaper reading, he was always among the first to arrive. In his office, he cut open the bundle the night watchman had deposited outside his door, and removed the tag addressed in red: *"Ambassade d'Autriche."* Recalling that the United Nations troops on Cyprus included an Austrian contingent, he first looked through the papers with them in mind. None dead yet? Then, felt pen in hand, he began to read seriously. Every half hour he stood up and tore the reports of the French news agency off the Telex, which went on ticking inexorably. He had also turned on the short-wave radio. It was still early morning when news of the provisional cease-fire on Cyprus came through; after that he was undisturbed, alone with himself. As usual the newsprint made his fingers blacker and blacker. He didn't once shift his position while reading, didn't once run his hand over his face, not even when it itched; he merely read and underscored so-called key phrases. Without looking up and without a moment's hesitation. Where were

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the SELLING POINTS the guidelines demanded? At the farm show in Compiègne, a reforestation machine made in Austria was on display. At an exhibition of optical instruments in Lyons, a research microscope from Austria had been demonstrated. *Le Monde* had good things to say of environmental measures taken in the Tyrol. Once again *L'Aurore* spoke of anti-Semitism in Austria, though in accordance with the guidelines, he had already sent them several letters of protest and rectification. On the other hand, a comsumer magazine gave an Austrian ski binding an excellent rating. But *Le Parisien libéré* referred to Bruckner as a German rather than an Austrian composer. —At about nine Keuschnig washed his hands and reported to the ambassador, who that day had arrived somewhat earlier than usual. The ambassador asked him what he thought of the fighting on Cyprus, but then, almost protectively, answered for him, so that Keuschnig merely had to drop an occasional: "Yes, that's quite possible," or "No, that can't be ruled out." Even the ambassador, who in his position, as he not infrequently remarked, could be expected to have an eye for people and their weaknesses, seemed to notice nothing. (Would he otherwise have listed course after course of the dinner he had eaten the night before at the home of some French count?) Keuschnig was relieved but at the same time, oddly enough, disappointed.

He drank his usual tea at a café on the Boulevard Latour-Maubourg. As he looked out at the street, it occurred to him that he couldn't have said anything to anyone. He often heard people saying: "If I had something to say . . . " —and now he thought: If I had something to say, I'd cross it all out. At the top of a garbage can on the sidewalk he saw a heap of coffee grounds and filter paper; as he looked at it, it reminded him of a lawn freshly fertilized with human manure: there had been toilet paper all over the young grass. He went to the men's room and pissed gloomily down into the hole. The smell of urine revived him. He thought of tomorrow and the day after and tugged at his fingers in disgust; he opened his mouth wide, at the same time looking around to make sure no one was watching him.

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On the way back to the embassy, Keuschnig had a sudden impulse to bare his teeth. Without prospect for the future, he had risen from the protective café chair. Compressing his lips, he nodded to a colleague who was coming toward him. At the sight of this colleague he thought of sleeve protectors, although he hadn't seen anyone in sleeve protectors for ages. Why couldn't the other man disregard him? Why did he have to COME TOWARD HIM? Brownish-yellow scraps of scum on milk that had been boiled days ago. True, he was still more or less alive, he was running around loose, but soon it would be all up with him. He wanted to beat everyone to a pulp! Everything, even the sense of well-being his first sip of tea had given him, now seemed RELATIVE. My life line has broken off, Keuschnig thought, as though still trying to cheer himself up a little. A baby carriage with a plastic cover was standing in a doorway, an image of panic terror; as he hurried past, it completed the dream he hadn't finished dreaming that night. He forced himself to go back and examine the baby carriage in every detail.

He saw two blacks walking ahead of him, both with their hands deep in their pockets, so that the slits of their jackets gaped wide and their behinds stuck out—both had the same gaping slits and the same behinds! A woman was wearing two different shoes, one with a platform much higher than the other. Another woman was carrying a cocker spaniel in her arms and crying. He felt like a prisoner in Disneyland.

On the sidewalk he read, written in chalk: *"Oh la belle vie,"* and underneath: "I am like you," with a phone number. Whoever it was had BENT DOWN to write about the GOOD LIFE, he thought, and made a note of the phone number.

In the office he read the newspapers that had just arrived. He was struck by the frequency of the words "more and more" in the headlines of a single page: "More and more babies are overfed," "More and more child suicides." In reading *Time* he was struck, on many pages, by the sentence: "I dig my life." "I dig my life," said a basketball star. "We are a happy family," said a war veteran. "I am very glad," said a country

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singer. "Now I dig my life," said a man who was using a new fixative for his dentures. Keuschnig wanted to howl long enough for everyone in the building to hear him. Then he looked up at the ceiling, cautiously, as though even that might give him away.

He had the sidewalk telephone number in front of him, but first he dialed several other numbers. He wanted to be alone as little as possible in the days to come, and cast about for friends and acquaintances to take up his time. Before each call, for fear some slip of the tongue would give him away or that he would suddenly be unable to go on, he wrote down word for word what he intended to say. In the end he had made an appointment for every evening and his date book was full to the end of the month. I'll lose myself in my work, he thought. Then he called the sidewalk number. A woman answered. She said she couldn't remember writing anything on the pavement, she must have been drunk. Keuschnig, who had only wanted to needle her, said: "You were not drunk. I shall be at the Café de la Paix, the one across from the Opéra, at nine tomorrow evening. Will you come?" "Perhaps," said the woman, and then: "Yes, I'll come. But let's not arrange any signs. I'd like us to just recognize each other. I'll be there."

At twelve o'clock Keuschnig took the rue Saint-Dominique to the stop of the 68 bus, as usual on his way to see a girl friend in Montmartre. For a while he drifted into side streets, following a girl with CHICAGO CITY written on the seat of her jeans. He wanted to see her face. Then he noticed he had forgotten her. In the bus he saw he was all alone, and for a moment that made him very happy. A shudder ran through him, it gave him a sense of power, directed against no one. At the next stop he looked up, and already there were several heads in front of him.

When Keuschnig looked out of the bus window, his field of vision swarmed with transparent pockmarks, and when he closed his eyes and opened them again, there were still more of them. After getting out he decided to stand still for a mo-

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ment and look patiently at something, the sky for instance. And then he stood there, feeling nothing. *"C'est normal,"* said a passer-by. Yes, everything was wretchedly normal, *elendig normal.* He thought of an Austrian country shrine called Maria Elend.

He behaved as innocently as possible: for the first time he bought flowers for his girl friend. An observer's suspicions would be overcome if he saw him going into this florist's shop. He was only one among many, someone concerned with everyday matters, carefree enough to buy flowers. He decided to be pedantic. In the cool shop, seeing himself as a man having gladioli wrapped, he felt so secure that he would have liked to help the salesgirl tie the bow. The atmosphere, the smell of water, the puddles on the floor, did him good. The beautiful, slow meticulousness with which she set down the gladioli side by side on the paper! Up until now, when asked whether flowers should be gift wrapped, he would automatically have said no and contented himself with the usual wrapping; today he looked on with interest as the girl stuck the pins into the paper. During the whole operation —cutting the stems, removing the faded pedals, wrapping, and finally handing him the wrapped flowers—she had not made one superfluous movement, and today this struck him as beautiful. In the shop he felt sheltered. He was able to smile, though his lips tautened, and she smiled too. Her purely professional friendliness made him feel that she was treating him as a human being, and that touched him.

Just like anyone else he climbed the slope of Montmartre with his bouquet. Amid the smells of the rue Lepic, changing from one market stall to the next—fish, cheese, the flannel smell of suits hanging in the sun—he lost all identity . . . Then suddenly the smell of bread from the open door of a bakery drew him into memory, not his own, but a new, amplified, and improved memory, in which the flat scene before him took on a third dimension. Here no one seemed irresolute, weighed down by himself; among these people, whom he would never know, he felt secure. Outside his girl friend's

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door, he wiped his shoes with exaggerated care, meanwhile laughing maliciously—at whom? —But when he heard steps approaching from within, he was seized with desperate embarrassment at the thought that their meeting would be the same as usual, shameless, that they would smile at each other in recognition. There was still time, he could still climb another flight of stairs. Keuschnig stood motionless, one foot beside the other, until the door opened—as usual, except that now the absurdity almost killed him.

He didn't show that anything was wrong. For a moment it had upset him that Beatrice recognized him right away. Suddenly he was afraid that he wouldn't recognize her the next time, and tried to imprint her features, or some distinguishing mark, on his memory. —Beatrice worked part-time as a translator at UNESCO headquarters in the 15th arrondissement. Her husband had been killed when his motorcycle had collided with a trailer truck. She lived alone with two children, who were out at the moment. Keuschnig had first met her at a reception at the embassy. She had come up to him and asked: "What shall we do now?" —He came to see her often. He liked to watch her going about her domestic routines. She told a good many stories, and it gave him a strong tranquil pleasure to listen to her. "I'm never afraid of doing anything wrong in front of you," she said. They saw no harm in being together. "Maybe our seeing no harm in it is a good sign," said Beatrice. She took everything that came her way as a sign. But even where others saw a harbinger of calamity, she found confirmation of her belief that things would get better and better. Unpleasant happenings irritated her, but she took them too as favorable signs. Consequently she lived confidently from day to day, and when Keuschnig was with her, the moment when everything would cease to count seemed to him, sometimes at least, infinitely remote.

But now, without warning, everything in sight became a sign of death. He didn't want to look at anything; and because, even with his eyes open, he saw nothing to which he could hold fast, the oppression in his chest rose to his throat.

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He thought of the baby carriage with the plastic cover in the doorway and the crumbled plaster on the cover, and turned away without meaning to when as usual Beatrice started to help him out of his jacket. But it was he who was suddenly afraid of saying something wrong, or doing something wrong; it was he who suddenly couldn't help seeing some harm in everything, in cutting meat, in an embrace, even in breathing. The acts that should be performed naturally—drawing-the-cork-out-of-the-bottle, spreading-the-napkin-on-his-knees—he now performed as ceremonial functions and was afraid of being untrue to his role. In mortal terror, he suddenly called up his home. "Is all well?" he asked, deliberately using the stilted phrase to hide his anxiety. Back at the table, he was determined to do everything by himself, though as a rule he had liked Beatrice to peel an apple for him, for instance, at the end of the meal.

He didn't let her undress him. If she were to touch him, he would crush her with his fist. The actions of laying-his-trousers-over-the-back-of-a-chair, of lying-down-in-bed-together, of inserting-the-penis-in-the-vagina. When she stroked his member with her fingernail, he felt she was infecting him with some loathsome skin disease. Intermittently, under the light pressure of her vagina, he felt protected, but at the orgasm, in place of something hot, a cold shiver came out of him and instantly spread over his whole body. He wished he were washed and dressed that minute, sitting opposite her, at some distance. When she looked at him, he passed his thumb over her lids as though in a caress, to make her close her eyes and stop seeing him. A moment later she opened them again. Those open eyes seemed to be laughing; this time he forcibly held them shut. Beatrice turned her head away from his hand and went on looking at him, more amused than alarmed. Thereupon he closed his own eyes. —He kept them closed until he felt safe again. Then it became unbearable not to see anything. When he opened his eyes, his lids popped obscenely, as though they had been pasted and an effort had been needed to tear them open, first one, then the

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other. Beatrice was still looking at him, or rather, she had begun to *watch* him—as though something were wrong. Though her mouth was closed, her lips were slightly parted at one corner, revealing a bit of glinting canine. He thought of a dead pig, but only to avoid feeling inferior to her. The longer they looked at each other, the more concerned she became and the more he lost interest. Merely because he hadn't a thought in his head, he grimaced—no, his face turned into a grimace without his stirring a muscle. He simulated a yawn, so as to be able to close his eyes again. Then he took hold of Beatrice's hair and forced her head down to his belly; she took his member into her mouth and pushed it out with her tongue; if her face had been on a level with his, he might have thought she was sticking out her tongue at him. Filled with warmth, he had a feeling that he and Beatrice briefly belonged together, and that if he could only start talking, he would come to understand her completely.

In the kitchen they drank coffee. He watched her taking the *crême caramel* out of the icebox, so it wouldn't be too cold when the children came home. Then she did indeed sit down across from him, out of reach, just as he had wished, and carefully sharpened pencils, lead pencils for the older child and colored pencils for the younger one, who still went to the *école maternelle*. As he looked at her, he succeeded little by little in immersing himself in his vision. He heard the water flowing in the gutter of the silent street outside the open window. It gurgled over an occasional jutting stone, and the longer he listened the more his vision expanded; the flowing water turned into a brook, whose gurgling flow related to an almost forgotten event. The pencils, which Beatrice kept turning in her pencil sharpener, RASPED—and suddenly Keuschnig couldn't remember his own name. He was out of danger as long as so much unfinished business was left on the kitchen table. Kitchen table: those words meant something now. A certainty. He could get up and leave it, yet always come back to this place—where there were red floor tiles and Beatrice, attentively turning pencils but then suddenly holding a pencil

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still and turning the sharpener, as though a mere fancy in her head had become an embodied wish, as though an impersonal idea had become a personal contradiction or a long-outgrown memory a present emotion. The apartment around him now seemed to be on ground level, yet bright and airy as if it were somewhere high in the sky. —Ecstatically Keuschnig closed his eyes to keep from crying, but also to relish his tears the more.

He saw everything as though for the last time. While still looking at Beatrice, he no longer belonged to her, he could only—indeed, he *had* to—behave as if he did. There was a crackling inside him, then everything went to pieces. A complicated fracture of the mind, he thought. A few splinters of emotion had worked their way through the outer covering, and he had gone rigid forever. Can one, in speaking of the body, speak of ugly suffering? The body has ugly *wounds,* the soul has ugly *suffering*. And some bodily wounds have been beautiful, so much so that one has been sorry to see them heal, but in the mind there is only suffering, and that is *ugly*. —"I think I've eaten too much," he said to Beatrice, who looked at him from time to time with interest, but without alarm. Outside the window a seed capsule floated past. Good Lord! Keuschnig had a feeling that the shit in his bowels had turned the wrong way. In another second he would be sending a loud fart into the room.

For a moment Beatrice averted her eyes, but then looked at him again. She wants to help me, he thought, in such a rage that he might almost have struck her in the face; his forearm, resting on the table, had gone tense. He withdrew it discreetly, and she blew the shavings out of her pencil sharpener. Above all, no special treatment! Covertly he checked to make sure the position of his legs under the table was the same as usual. One leg stretched out, the other bent—right. What Keuschnig feared most was that someone might show understanding, or actually understand him. If someone were to say knowingly: "We all have such days. I've had them myself"—it would sicken him; but if someone were to under-

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stand him silently, then he would feel disgraced. And Beatrice had turned away, as though to avoid seeing through him. That was it, she simply had no desire to. Which meant that she didn't take him seriously, which was just as well. Cheerfully he stood up, bent over the table, and touched her; she gave her shoulders a big shrug, failing to understand his gesture, but accepting it because it was *his*. Things would never again be the same as before, thought Keuschnig nor did he want them to be. Actually they never had been. How fragmented his former life seemed to him, how . . . he couldn't even say. And for the second time he became curious. "Your eyes have suddenly contracted so," said Beatrice. "Are you thinking of an adventure?" "What about you?" "Always," she said. "Just at the most ecstatic moment, I always think the real thing is still to come."

They left the apartment together. She took the elevator, he went down the stairs. On the street they met again, but parted at once, Beatrice with a serious but untroubled countenance, wordlessly, as though all necessary arrangements had been made. So long, see you tomorrow. But what about today? He would go back to work; at six he would attend a press conference at the Elysée Palace, devoted to the program of the new government; at nine he would dine at home with an Austrian writer who happened to be living in Paris (an instance of the seated entertainment provided for in his budget); and after that he would presumably be tired enough to fall into a dreamless sleep. A full program, he thought gratefully; not a free moment, every move mapped out until midnight or later, when he would switch off his bedside lamp. For today at least every minute was taken up; no room for any dangerous extra motion; the bliss of a crowded timetable. —And indeed, when he thought about it, he felt blissfully hedged about. He was able to lift his eyes untroubled; the world lay before him as though it had been waiting for him the whole time.

The air was so clear that from the hill one was able to look out on all sides beyond the edge of Paris, where the land was

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green again. This was a vista that precluded all thought of confusion; every detail, however recalcitrant, was subordinated to the overall picture. That suited him at present, because he didn't want to be reminded of anything. In the presence of this panorama, which even after the first glance presented no salient features, he was able to exhale himself until nothing troublesome remained. —Suddenly he caught sight of a tourist in an army jacket standing next to him. A toothbrush protruded from his breast pocket. Before actually noticing this toothbrush, Keuschnig remembered with a jolt, as though he had suddenly become his own double, that such a toothbrush had occurred in his dream the night before and had been connected with him in his role of fugitive murderer. Thus far he had been able, while standing on the hillside, to see it as a dream. And what now? How absurd that a panoramic view of this kind should correct the dimensions of things. What then were the right dimensions? My dream was true, he thought, and now I've betrayed it to this harmony that was drummed into me. Panoramic coward with the eyes of a glider pilot. That dream must have been the first sign of life in me since God knows when. I should have taken it as a warning. It came to me because I'd been looking in the wrong direction, it wanted me to turn around. To wake me up and make me forget my somnambulistic certainties. It has always been easy for me to forget dreams. It will be difficult to drop my certainties, because they will cross my path day after day —though in reality others have merely dreamed them for me. The certainty, for instance, of my vision as I look on swarming humanity from this hill, merely perpetuates someone else's dream of life. What, thought Keuschnig, is my dream of life? I will forget my certainty by losing myself in a dream of life. Let us suppose that last night's dream was my dream of life. —Keuschnig had an impulse to follow the stream that was flowing down the gutter and would soon merge with another stream—to follow it across the whole city.

From time to time, that day, he felt very cheerful, but never for long. In the moment of breathing easy, his breath

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caught, and everything became impossible. Even in his bright moments he couldn't help wondering what would happen next. Always having to think of the future, yet unable to conceive of any future—that added up to hopelessness. Up until then he had seldom felt so cheerful and never so hopeless. And every time he felt cheerful he lost confidence in his feeling; his cheerfulness did not remain present to him, nothing remained present—not even the thought of a dream of life. Like a voluptuary he kept thinking of only one thing, though the one thing was not a woman's hole but the unimaginable. Could it be that no one saw his obscene face? He couldn't understand why after a first glance someone didn't cast another, special sort of glance at him, or why no woman turned away after taking one look at him. Actually, a woman had turned away, averted her face in disgust. Maybe people would know him for what he was if he stood beside a clump of bushes in the park.

He had a taste of blood in his mouth. The repulsive part of it was not that he had become different during the night but that everything seemed to eternally the same. And there was nothing repulsive about his showing himself as he did; what was repulsive was that the people around him didn't do likewise. He tried to figure out how old he was, and counted not only the years but also the months and days, until the minute now, in which he was standing on the top of Montmartre. He had already spent so much time! When he considered how just this last hour had weighed on him, it was beyond him that he hadn't suffocated long ago. But the time must somehow have passed? Yes, somehow the time had passed. Somehow the time would pass: that was the most hideous part of it. When he saw people older than himself, they instantly struck him as obsolete. Why hadn't they gone out of existence long ago? How was it possible that they had survived and were keeping right on? There had to be some trick—routine alone couldn't account for it. He admired them a little, but for the most part they disgusted him; he had no curiosity about their tricks. Undoubtedly that Dane over there

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in the car with the Copenhagen plates deserved to be admired for driving relentlessly across the whole of Europe instead of falling off a cliff on the way, but wouldn't it have been more honorable of him to drive his car off a bridge before it was too late—on the Autobahn for instance? Because here he was just making a fool of himself with his Danish presence! —Altogether nothing made sense; the world only pretended to be sensible; much too sensible, Keuschnig thought. That a couple who sat down at a café table should still be a couple when they got up again: how very sensible! It was beyond him how when the two of them got up they could still be talking to each other, and in a friendly tone what's more, as though nothing were wrong. —And it wasn't true that he had only begun to see himself and others in this light the night before. Little by little it came back to him that even earlier he had been unable to understand how everything could simply flow along and remain as it was. Once he had crossed the whole of Paris on Line 9 of the Métro just to find out exactly what the advertisement for DUBONNET painted at regular intervals on the walls of the dark tunnels between stations represented. The train went so fast that he never saw the whole picture but always the same small segment, and could make no sense of it. He should have got out in midtown, but as it was he continued on to the PORTE DE CHARENTON on the southeast edge of Paris, where the train had to slow down because of men working, and there he finally saw that the vague blobs represented bright-colored clouds and that the sphere in front of them was a kind of sun decorated with the colors of all the countries where DUBONNET was consumed . . . In those days everything had tended to run too fast, and he had run along, because he wanted to recognize things. Since this last night something had stopped. This something was unrecognizable, and he could only turn away. To be initiated had become absurd, to be taken back into the fold had become unimaginable, to belong had become hell on earth. He saw great lumps of overcooked rice in a pot as big as the world. The swindle had been exposed and he was disenchanted.

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Keuschnig went down the hill, step for step. What affectedly carefree gaits, what inimically serene faces. He felt no desire to emulate them, only a furious impulse to ape them—all these faces so bright and summery that the only way to bear them was to ape them, as sometimes at a café, often involuntarily to be sure, you ape the facial expression of those women who trip past you so mincingly, looking neither to left nor right for fear of losing their semblance of beauty, or as a drunk returning a stare is likely to put on the starer's expression.

A woman coming in the opposite direction broke into a smile in the middle of the street and began to run. He was frightened. Had she gone mad? Then he saw someone some distance off, walking toward her—and he too was smiling. Imperturbably smiling, they approached one another, preserving their smiles the whole way despite every obstacle, although the man stumbled over an empty wooden crate and the woman collided with a passer-by. Keuschnig couldn't bear the sight any longer and, conscious of pressure on his bladder, walked away. Now, he thought, they'll be putting their preposterous arms around each other, looking into each other's pitiful eyes, kissing each other's pathetic cheeks, left and right. And then imperturbably they'll go their senseless says. Spooky! He had the feeling of having to lower his bottom jaw to let the accumulated saliva run out. He saw a child standing lost in thought; a bubble came out of its mouth and burst. He passed a man carrying a black attaché case. You'd think he'd be ashamed! Keuschnig thought. When I see somebody like that, I could cross myself. —Yet he himself was carrying just such an attaché case, and instead of throwing it into the nearest trash can he heroically went on carrying it. Heroes of everyday life. He couldn't get rid of the idiotic smile he had put on to ape people, and it was starting to itch. He didn't scratch with his fingers but tried to relieve the itch by making even worse faces. Even the infants under the parasols, with their mashed-carrot-colored cheeks struck him as fakes. Even they, he thought, are only acting as if. The truth

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is that they're absolutely fed up with their preposterous baby existence! When he saw an animal, he was amazed that it wasn't doing its business at that particular moment. Once he thought: if anybody speaks to me now, I'll crack his skull for him. If someone so much as looked at him, Keuschnig said to him in his thoughts: Watch your step! (Nevertheless, he couldn't see why no one spoke to him. When a Frenchman from the provinces asked him the way to the RUE DE L'ORIENT, he was grateful to be able to direct him, and his next few steps were winged.)

To everything that crossed his path he wanted to say: Don't show yourself again! And instantly whatever it was did show itself again, in another form but with the same loathsome substance. He didn't catch sight of things; they showed themselves. He walked quickly for fear that someone would notice his ruthlessness. Yet when a woman with a conspicuously low-cut dress came toward him, he stared brazenly in an attempt to spy her nipples. —Everything seemed taken care of, as though in a game of puss-in-the-corner the last player had found a place and there was no further need for a supernumerary to be standing around. How boring he seemed to himself; how alone!

The sweet familiar after-feeling in his member, which ordinarily stayed with him long after he had been with Beatrice, had soon left him. Now he looked only *at the ground*. A peach stone that someone had just thrown away lay damp on the sidewalk; looking at it, Keuschnig suddenly realized that it was summer, and this became strangely important. A good omen, he thought, and after that he was able to walk more slowly. Perhaps there would be more such signs. The plate-glass windows of a café that had closed for the summer were whitened on the inside . . . The wheels of a bicycle on top of a passing car flashed as they turned. The smell of shellfish came to him from the market stalls that had closed in the meantime, and he breathed deeply, as though that smell had power to heal.

When at the foot of the hill he stepped out into the Place

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Blanche, there was suddenly so much space around him that he stopped still. "San Diego." Had he heard that or only thought it? —In either case, no sooner had SAN DIEGO entered his head than he clenched his fists and thought: Who said the world has already been discovered?

In the next moment, while standing motionless on the Place Blanche, he wanted to leave Paris immediately. But then he realized that though a journey might at one time have made some difference, it wouldn't any more. From this thing that had hit him, there was no possibility of flight. Besides, it hadn't hit him—it had just happened. It had long been due. San Diego and his fist clenching—both meant he would stay in Paris and not give himself up for lost. I'll show you yet! he thought. —Even so, the sound of a typewriter coming out of a travel bureau filled him with envy and yearning; the keys were being struck hesitantly—now one letter, now another—as though someone were typing the difficult name of some city beyond the sea. And then the click of a calculator—as though the waiting customer's bill for the plane fare and his stay in the faraway city were being made out.

A couple were standing on the sidewalk, both decrepit with age. The man rested his trembling head on the woman's shoulder, not as a momentary gesture but because he couldn't hold it up. With one hand the woman pressed his head against her shoulder, and thus inseparable they slowly crossed the square. Like man and wife, Keuschnig thought contemptuously, and yet for a moment he was mollified by an intimation of something else. "You're not the world," he said to himself, feeling strangely proud of the couple. —But when he stepped into a cab a moment later the usual dog in the seat beside the driver barked at him as if he shouldn't have been allowed to get in, and at the old familiar sound of the diesel engine he experienced a murderous rage. Oh yes, now he *was* the world, and all at once his attempts to hush up the fact appeared to him in the form of an image: he had an apple out of which a bite had been taken, and kept trying to put

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it into a basket with others in such a way as to conceal the damage, but the apple kept rolling to one side, and the bitten part always ended on top. And that was the truth of it: already the driver was cranking down his window and shouting *"Salaud!"* at the traffic, already he was talking to him over his shoulder as to an accomplice. From now on, thought Keuschnig, I won't answer anyone—I'll only SPEAK SIDEWAYS. Whimper sideways. All at once he sympathized with the dog for letting his tongue dangle from the side of his mouth. What massive nausea—beyond the help of smelling salts! A minute of silence! he thought, just one minute of silence, please, in this eternal hubbub of absurdity! A tumult had sprung up on a street corner, and now everything around him was one great tumult; no end in sight—but the one thought in his head was the thought of an end.

Suddenly he saw his face in the rear-view mirror. It was so distorted that at first he refused to recognize it. He wasn't looking for comparisons, but several animals came to mind. No one with that face could express thoughts or feelings. He looked at himself again, but since he was now prepared, as he had been in the morning outside the bakery, he couldn't find the same face, not even when he grimaced while searching for it. But it had happened: with that one unplanned glance he had lost his acceptance of his own appearance. What self-control Beatrice must have needed! Women are said to be less squeamish than men. In any case, he thought, a person with a face like that should keep quiet. With such a mug you've got to have your nerve with you even to carry on conversations with yourself. Inconceivable that he would ever again say amiably to himself: "Come on, old fellow." On the other hand—and at this thought he sat up straight—with such a face I can afford to have feelings which up until now have come to me only in dreams!—and instantly he remembered the brand-new pleasure it had given him to pee on a woman in a dream. He had been upset when he woke up. That wasn't me, he had thought. But such pleasure went with his newly discovered face; far from being unlike him,

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it was his very own self. He now understood that with this unmasked face nothing, nothing whatsoever, could be unlike him. "Not like me" had lost its validity as an argument. But by the same token he could now dispense with remorse. With such a face no excuses were possible. Keuschnig thought himself capable of anything, even a sex murder. At last he owned to himself that killing the old woman in his dream had been a sex murder. —Suddenly the cab driver's dog began to growl at him, and Keuschnig was afraid of himself. Time to get back to work, he thought. Good old office.

The afternoon had been going on and on, and now time became acute, like an organ one doesn't notice until it stops functioning. All at once there was so much of it that, instead of just passing, it took on an existence of its own. Everybody was affected; now no one could take refuge in activity; and almost with a sense of liberation Keuschnig reflected that at last he wasn't alone in this predicament. What had previously been a mere organ of universal unity became independent, became something more than its functioning, and from then on nothing functioned. The day seemed to have grown too long, time was now a hostile element that threatened a somnolent civilization with catastrophe. It was as though everyday time were no longer in force, and as though this condensed, hostile time were meant for a human being only in the sense that a trap is "meant" for someone, and as though even an animal would be unable to smell it out. All at once time began to pass amid the buildings as though governed by an extra-human system, in a dimension different from the course of the streets or the riverbank parapet or the motion of construction cranes, different from the whirling of pigeon feathers falling from the roofs or of the seed capsules gliding between motorcars. It seemed to Keuschnig that this merciless, elemental time crawling along under the tall luminous sky had expelled all life from the world, that every manifestation of human beings had become a meaningless interlude. Some children were hopping about on a dance floor that had been knocked together for some long-past fete, and a few ridiculous

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leaflets that no longer meant anything to anyone were skittering this way and that. As though the sky now partook of an alien system, it became too high for the high towers of civilization in the foreground of the picture, and against the compact, menacing background the human landscape degenerated into a junkyard. The deep blue with which a time grown plethoric weighed on the world was the essential—the scattered leaflets down below, in which only fear of life or death could beguile him (or anyone else!) to find the slightest meaning, were a secondary, minor factor. Keuschnig saw the sky arching over the Place de la Concorde as something incongruous and hostile, plunging its edges down at the Place. The street lamps on the Pont des Invalides glowed black before his eyes, as after long staring at the cloudless heavens—a memory of a past fete. Unable to confront the great open square—no, not now!—he left the cab before it reached the Esplanade des Invalides and ran—to what safety? Suddenly, as he ran, a warm raindrop fell from the clear, dark sky and landed on the back of his hand . . . When, in the rue Fabert, Keuschnig saw the brass plate inscribed "Austrian EMBASSY," he was able to "laugh again," and back in his office, the moment a sheet of clean white paper emerged from the black roller of his typewriter, he had the feeling that things were back to normal . . . Only once did he cower and hold his ears, his heart pounding deep in his body, as though outside, beyond the sheltering walls, something had erupted, against which the best decorated embassy was powerless. Heaven help those who are now defenseless, he thought, yet at the same time he hoped that this state of affairs would go on, because in his present, apocalyptic mood he had no personal feeling of himself, or at any rate so little as to believe he shared it with all others. But what if he were mistaken?—That, Keuschnig thought, would be the end of a possibility, even if the apparently universal situation outside me were only my personal situation.

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James Bertolino

Mom & Sally

You are seventeen, your name
is Sally & you
get wet
when you kiss your Mom.

For six years your sex life
has been a still
you've dabbed at but
never changed. There's no

blonde college boy who loves
the physical,
no shifty neighbor
who peeps while you read &

move your hand. There's just the two
of you, & the breathlessness
you live in
with the chickens, the cat,

the doberman & the bats in the barn.

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Philip Murray

The Mugging of Charlie Chan: Or, Interruptions in an 18th Century German Romance

One sunny afternoon on Morningside Heights
From the window-seat of the Crosstown bus,
I gaze up momentarily between chuckles
Amid Jean Paul's tendril-flower of allusions
In "Schmelzle's Journey to Flaetz;"
Something may be happening in the real world.

There is an old Chinaman shuffling guilelessly
Home along the pavement sloping Westward.
I say to myself slyly—"Charlie Chan;"
That's my innocent revenge on ethnic groups
Who call me "Murphy," or file me under Mr. Philip.
Thus I establish my hero-victim's name.

Eftsoons, there appear from the rocky meadows
Of the neighborhood ghetto, two teenaged boys
In leathery motley, like over-sized *putti*
In some Renaissance painting, leaping upon
A fallen saint to bear him up;
They pounce on Charlie Chan to bear him down.

Fie, fie, on such an unequal contest.
Charlie Chan has all the advantages.
He has safely crossed (until now)
Life's desert, and these poor boys have
Just begun. They have nothing
But their knives and their unscrupulousness.

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They are completely out of cigarettes,
And those new toys giggling on the near horizon
Require expensive coaxing short of rape.
Charlie Chan has his restaurants and sons
Behind him, and he owns and carries a wallet.
He does not believe in a god from the machines.

The youngsters jump him shrewdly from behind.
(Charlie Chan is elderly, but he is not blind.)
The first half-strangles him, pushing his head back;
The other frisks him, skilfully seizing the prize.
They are off and running. They do not kick him;
Some amenities are curtailed in broad daylight.

The boys run East waving their trophy proudly;
The old man stares after them, stunned;
A moment later, he shuffles West again.
He does not even shout or point. He knows
It is a crime to be mugged in such a neighborhood.
He hopes only to escape arrest himself.

The colored lady beside me exclaims
"Did you see that?" I admit I did,
Returning glumly to my German Romance;
And before you can say Attila Schmelzle
I am back in my apartment thinking it over.
I'll finish this inhuman comedy for myself.

Charlie Chan hurries in his own slow gait
To the nearest Laundry where Number One Son
Still irons a blizzard of shirts a day,
And over a strong cup of smoky souchong tea,
The old man explains, confusedly, in perfect Mandarin
How he came, this afternoon, to lose his wallet.

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Marjorie Hawksworth

Urban Renewal

Why don't you go downtown—
in one manhole
and out the other—
past thirty-two
green lights
and a forest of stop signs
that bear no leaves.
The lack of vegetation
on Broadway
is due to the fact
that the city
planning commission
has ordained that
most lawns within
the limits of the municipality
are to be grown
on billiard tables—
fertilized by the organic matter
that is commonly
trapped in pinball machines
when the marbles
sit on their commodes.

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Tamara Watson

No Advice for the Lovelorn

I

He said goodbye for the last time in a cafe in
Saint-Paul-de-Vence, over a glass of Chablis.
She lingered over cheese and fruit before requesting
the check. "Is there anything I can do?" the waiter
asked. "Yes," she replied. "Meet me at eight
in the lobby of my hotel."

II

"Come to the Yukon," he said. "We'll travel by dogsled.
Wrapped in furs, we'll sleep by a cedar fire." "Better yet,"
she said, "we'll get married; then we'll sleep by a cedar fire."
"O.K.," he said, "but I must be honest. There were one-
hundred
eighty-one marriages in the Yukon last year, and forty-seven
ended in
divorce. We'll be taking a chance." "Yes," she agreed,
"but your wife—what about her?" "Won't know till the
thaw,"
he replied. "If they don't find her then, they won't ever."

III

She noticed him in the crowd, in the vertigo of plumed
heads, oiled and undulating arms. His eyes danced
with a sparkler's light. "O Rio night," he wrote.
"You are my golden light, my wildly painted dream
of jungle bright, my river deep and green." The next
day he received a note. "My love," she had written, "I
will always remember the carnival, the night we spent
together, and you really are a poet, but I can't see you
again on my honeymoon."

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IV

She had first seen him at the Palace of Congresses.
The opera was long. Her attention slipped to his gloved
hands.
At entre-acte they had shared caviar and champagne. She
waited now for him in the drawing room of his apartment.
From the window there was a view of Saint Basil's. "I
am quite wealthy." His voice sounded from the recesses of
the far bedroom. "I would imagine so," she replied. "Yes,
fortunately I am," he continued. "What about your Marxist
ideals?"
she asked. "Not at all incongruous, my dear," he replied.
"My
father was wealthy. It's simple heredity. I have whatever
I really want." "And I am something you want?" He
emerged
from the bedroom, slipping into his jacket. "Not at all that,"
he said, smiling. "You are quite unique. You are, I admit,
not the Great Catherine, Tolstoy's Natasha, a Romanoff
princess,
or even the Volga by starlight. But in a city where so little
comes at so dear a price, you will certainly do."

V

"Look out the window," he said. "This is Marrakech. *Souks,*
djellabas, snake charmers, holy men, street hawkers, Berber
bangles, Couscous, caravans, and caftans. The soothsayer at
Jemaa el Fna said I would meet a tall olive-skinned woman
with the reflection of gold in her eyes. She is there
somewhere. I can feel it. Among all those people, veiled,
robed, turbaned. Near a minaret, a mosque, in the *medina,*
she is there. I have only to search to find her. You must help
me. You are my nurse, companion, guide. I'll not be well
until
I find her. You know that." "Look at me," she said. "Do
I not
have skin like sands struck by noonday sun, eyes like a dove's.

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Are not my robes perfumed for pleasure.'' ''Yes, yes,'' he said.
''But I don't want to see you just yet. Later, by moonlight—say
eleven o'clock by that wall, under the flowering tree. Wear a veil,
and for god's sake, take off those white shoes.''

VI

She gave him a note in the courtyard of the palace
of Holyroodhouse. The note read: ''I'll not be continuing
this trip in your company. Keep the room overlooking the Firth
and don't forget your cheques are under the dresserscarf.''
When he looked up, she was walking through the iron gate
toward the crags. ''But hold up,'' he shouted. ''I don't know
your name.'' ''Mary, Queen of Scots,'' she replied, through cupped
hands, ''and I'm on my way home.''

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Deborah Pease

Geography Lesson

"Nebraska and Oklahoma have the longest contiguous border
Of any two states," you announce.
Your hair stands up in corkscrews
Imparting the distracted air
Of a genius able to persuade anyone
That Nebraska and Oklahoma share a border
In spite of Kansas sitting in between.
I rushed to my atlas to check on this proximity.
My geography is faulty, a basic skill never properly acquired.
Like long division.
Never mind "contiguous" borders,
Let's just get our states in order,
Our land masses organized. But this is not possible.
If I mention the Punjab, you embark upon the Humboldt
Current
Which flows, to my knowledge, nowhere near Hindus.
A quirk of circuitry too brilliant to follow
Spirals you continents away
Like the cyclone that swallowed Kansas.
Our minds never meet when fact intervenes:
I know too few to counter the punctilious onslaught
Of your passion to misinform.
My only defense against your smooth wrong-headedness
Is to retreat to high ground, altering the terrain.
Esoteric facts, mostly unverifiable,
Are your slithery armies; a rude semblance
Of common sense is my recourse.
Outside this cerebral misalliance
We meet congenially, with the nearness of love, in Nebulae.

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Four Poems by Joan Moore

Grace

for Grace

I know Grace
who speaks to fire.
She tells this on herself
as if she doesn't see
her strangeness
(I think she does, a bit)—
how when she's building it
she's quiet, except for music on.
Then when it's laid to suit her,
she stands back,
affirms what she has done;
just before she strikes the match,
she turns the music down, and
with a flourish, "Burn," she says,
and lights the fire.

Through the night Grace lives by fire.
She sings to it, she reads it poetry,
she knits and rocks and nods and . . .
in your caves I hear your lean dogs
snapping at the bleeding bores . . . fire,
who is singing from their wounds . . .
who, the rusty stones? . . .
During dinner in front of it,
almost beautiful in shadows
fire grows for her,
tossing her hair,
Grace throws it bones.

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Sometimes Grace goes out to dinner.
Slow to leave the fire, she
banks it with the care of mother
seeing off a child to sleep.
From the door she looks back
longingly. And
"Keep," she says. . . again,
stern, almost a bark—
"Keep!" And then she
goes into the dark.

On Choosing This Poet's Name

I myself, seeing it finally written on the page,
was amazed at the bloody juices I required and pumped
to permit me to pretend I found it natural.
To be more honest than feels well, I haven't yet
accepted it. May not ever, though I'll never tell.
After all, it is my name—or part of it—
the first two parts that ever fell upon the
first certificate. These two preceding all the others,
even maiden's last, which I'm dead set against;
it was the source of all my traumata in childhood,
representing as it did and ever shall amen
their angry god and his permitted prejudice.
So I have taken only my true first and middle names,
leaving that last family name to heaven,
where it's well-known, can run for office,
persecute, and leave me alone.
How plainly honest can one get?
Yet, there's something not quite right in it.
After my originals, there comes that little rain of names
on a larger storm of papers blowing over such a space
of time the little mind to whom the maiden's names
belonged

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is now two slender slippers in her grave; what's left out here—
these other raveled names—are impossible to sort and classify.
Yet being nearer, they suggest, more, true originals.
All this is quite absurd. Names are dispensable,
as we are being taught at last by our advanced establishment.
Numbers are fine substitutes for names. I cannot imagine
any female now, to get another number, doing what I often
in the past have done to get another name.
Unless I'm fantasizing, my double-dealings in this
name-changing business well might stop the earth
to protest in the name of shame.

It is the last of these ill-gained names
I find myself, somehow, disturbed to change.
My daughter, when she saw my brand new poet's name,
responded with astonishment. She had not foreseen
my doing such a thing. There was a kind of twisting
of her mouth around its trying to be fair—
she left the truth of what she felt up in the air:
she found it sham?
she found it stylish daring which should
be restricted, her eyes said, to those with style?

she found no reason for it setting there, the poems
not improved by poet's name?
or was this instinct in her soft humanity
like Amphitrite rising from the waves to defend
her father? The blood of wounded man is to a
woman like the woman's scent to man—it drives her mad
with, in her case, compassion; she is indignant
at his pain, is dangerous, and even will attack,
especially the females of her pack.
Does my daughter simply jump to suffer for this man,
her father—rebel at my rejection of his name, without
a thought that he might be relieved
to finally have my heart depart his sleeve?
And then, it's her name, too.

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I tell myself I do not care—that after all
these years of wearing their name,
which I'd remind them never helped me write a thing,
I can bring my own up from the basement,
Yet when I look at it—this new name—I feel no elation.
Rather, in the gut, a kind of pull.
And deep in my old appalachians, those most feminine
of hills, I hear the old familiar grunt.
I round an oak and there she is—
Up on her hind legs, standing in my path:
that she-bear whom I've known as long
as she's been there and I've been here.
She snaps at me. Would maul me if she could.
For in this wood the smallest pulling
at the ancient stays is cause for fear.
If one will test this place and keep alive,
one must be prepared to die.

My Family Seines The Rivers

What keeps me from my family,
despite a resolution
to deal more kindly with my enemy,
is their interference with a process
I find essential.
They cut off my breath.
They seine the rivers,
haul what's netted to the house,
and store it, in the same September
and as proudly as they put their pickles up.
What is this mania my family has
for keeping in the family
every piece of this and that—all junk—
the family thinks and does?

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Even packrats are more critical.
Can so many bad ideas,
poor invitations, ugly works,
with only an occasional success
substantiate this abstract mass—
this stubborn collective?
Apparently, and to my sorrow;
for if the family occupation will be
making history,
then it must seine:
to be is to prove having been.
To continue is to see that
every member is kept in
and if he flees, keeping
perfect account of him
and what he does—
stealing from, even killing him
if family must to keep the trust.

I've gone up-rivers to get rid of them
where I dispatch fish. The family
will say this is a lie—that I sit down
with them three times a day for prayers and meals—
that I've never been beyond the road
since brought to them by post.
Essential to the family is it be known
all members serve the home.
I say I've gone up-rivers.
I dispatch fish. Eels.
Hundreds, thousands, soon to be
millions of tons of eels; because unless
more than the nets will hold go out,
all will be seined—put in the house.
Poached by my family.

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One can't trust men. However eels . . .
require, to be, access to sea . . . eels
ever home forever homeless
in the coming leaving
home of ocean
lake canal lagoon
channel river loch and runnel
rapids eddy stream and bay
hiding warming oozed in mud
cushioning their eely sleep
on the nadir of their wakes . . .
Men turn in. However eels
coming in go ever out.
Born abyss, each elver is
the hieroglyph for watery worlds
those worlds the atlases of eels
parting waters seeking
echo
where these out through vastness flow
into blue arterioles
casting on light years of shores
their long sliding shadows.

These are the messengers I send.

And men in league
called family
and kin to me
stretch nets across
the rivers' throats
cut passage off
kill possibility
of song
of information
of reaching ocean . . .

yet I send them on . . .

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Poem Re: Woman's Vanity #2

For P

I am sitting here
on a high chair,
my feet just touching
floor, which makes my
thighs splay out against
the seat, fatter, heavier
than on a low chair.
I think of my thighs
as two seals, fall fat
for winter, spreading on the
edge of precipice to catch
and store some sinking sun.
More than seals, my thighs
need shining on.
They are dead white, and
winter only begun.

If I open my robe
I will see my thighs
holding a bristlebrush,
like black chalice in
a fat man's hands.
My robe I do not open.
What rises from my thighs
cannot be excused by
how I sit.
I think of other women,
how some are beautiful, and do not know it;
how most are not, and know;
how none opens her clothes
except to lovers
who, blinded by closeness,
are not critical.

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We learn submission and play fair.
But you, God, I want to know
how in this goddamn business
of attrition we, unexposed,
can get from chair to bed;
then, fully clothed,
let in the mortician?

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Three Poems by Virginia Terris

Identification

They called me to ask me if I know who you are.
But how can I? They have laid you
face downward against the coffin floor.
I have to turn you over if I am to find out.
Also you stink. I have to turn away.
But still I reach for you.

Your head slips sideways.
Your left eye hangs by a thread.
Your mouth crumbles around your teeth.
All your soft stuff melting away.
Your bones that you have hidden from me
coming into view. Now I am seeing
what you have been hiding from both of us.

You probably are the one with the typed name and address
at the house where no one is living.
You probably are the one neither of us is sure of.
But shall I say This is the right one? The wrong one?
You with your rotting cavernous face
what terrible thing has happened between us?
Did you discover what love is
leaving me to discover?

As they are opening their mouths to question me
I drop you back.

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The Beetle

I wait for a turd to drop down.
Instead, a hugh creature with the body of a beetle
and the head of a wise man
rises from the pool.
He clamps his teeth on my clitoris.
I yell at first
but after a short time
seeing he has a head on his shoulders
I realize I must reason with him.
"Let go," I say.

But he will not let go. His voice
edges out from around his ears.
"But you are starting at the wrong end," I say.
"One is usually destroyed from the head down."
He says, "But I am the one
who works from this end up.
Your head will keep reasoning me away.
Even your last cell will insist
on talking back to me."

Now it is time to leave for work.
Spending such a long time closed away
is causing comment downstairs.
But the beetle holds on.
He has reached my navel
and I am beginning to remember
the afternoons of love
when it was always summer.

A breast that has been beautiful
turns black. Falls away.
He gnaws my throat. I try
to call to others who are calling me

the beetle wings against my mouth

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Driving

I am an old woman with my head on a stick
perched in a model T. I
am driving you child next to me
without expectation
through this dark blue sea.

We look out over the ocean that covers the world.
Water is everywhere.
It covers the road. It covers the dunes.
There's no one else in this world of water
where we are.

I with parchment eyes and anger
am showing you small creature child
this ocean the color of intense sky
not smooth spotted monsters
that subsist on silver fishes
nor even the silver fishes themselves
jewels of the cave.

Child
there is nothing in this dark blue sea
and we will not turn back.

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Sue Marquand

Sue Coward Marquand was a valued friend to many of the people on this magazine. She was in Paris in the summer of 1953 when the magazine was founded. Her cousin, Blair Fuller, ran the Paris office in the 60s, and her husband, John Marquand, writing under the name of John Phillips, was an early contributor and advisor. Another cousin, Jill Fox, has also been a long-time associate of the magazine. In 1976 Sue fell ill with cancer and died in January of 1977. Her husband wrote the eulogy which follows, delivered by his half brother, Timothy, at services held on January 15th at the Unitarian Church of All Souls in New York City.

Sue was not overly fond of bullfights. I believe they wearied and distressed her, although she did enjoy the music, the colors, and the pageantry. She went to bullfights with me in Spain—long ago, twenty-three years ago—when we were first together. It was then she learned the Spanish word *"querencia."* This was very much a technical term, an "in-group" word bandied about in those days by us young *aficionados* of tauromachy. You may find it odd that Sue seized on it and that it became an important word in her vocabulary, in that private language she spoke with some of us.

A *querencia*, if Sue and I are not mistaken, is the indeterminate space in the arena where the doomed bull feels most secure against his tormentors, the spot he chooses to make his stand. It's hard to imagine from out of any bestiary an animal less evocative of Sueay than a black snorting bull; yet her heart always went out to him—with that immediate, quite awesome and nearly electric empathy she felt for another's pain.

Gradually some form of safety zone, or querencia, became indispensable to Sue. In recent years she often found it on the northern end of a large white sofa, under which she placed side by side her slippers or her shoes. "This is my querencia," she said. "Nobody else sits here." She lay her brown, but now too quickly greying, head on a couple of blue cushions. She would recline for hours, all alone, keeping her tormentors at bay. Possibly it was in this querencia —those soft blue eyes gazing infinitely far off from beneath the broad and never-to-be-forgotten eyebrows and over the unique nose

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she liked to refer to as being "slightly retroussé"; possibly there and in this lonely silence she generated the deep courage and the strength and the wisdom to face her own death.

Pain, and the abstract and the thought of death, were never remote from Sue. Nor was the thought of fear, which I thought was illusory, but which she well knew to be a valid dread of the abominable disease that was at the last to take her.

She had other, more immediate tormentors—aversions, really. A profound distaste for qualities, things, and beings she perceived as fraudulent. That phoniness in all of us, which we find an essential camouflage to our natures, rarely got by Sue. Yet she would forgive it quickly enough. Years back a brilliant, eccentric friend of ours—he was Doc Humes—was accused of this failing by a cross woman in a crowded parlor, and Humes replied, "What's wrong with phonies?" Such self-defense was affecting to Sue. She said, "He's a touching man, Doc Humes."

"Touching" was another word in her language. "Pompous" and "boring" she favored also—particularly "boring," which subsumed many a nuance of bombast and mendacity. Her last night on earth, stretched out flat on her querencia, after a terrifying seizure of pain that still held her in its vise even as more and ever more milliliters of Demerol were setting in, Sue watched on television President Ford's farewell speech before a joint session of Congress, on the State of the Union, no less. *"Boring! Boring! Boring!"* she insisted passionately, though, perforce, softly, with what was left of her one remaining vocal chord. She smote the sofa with a fist. "Why doesn't he just go home and go to bed?" Still the banalities and sophistries poured forth from CBS and our assembled lawmakers greeted each in a tumult of approbation. There was nothing for Sueay in the face of this grotesque experience but to mock it. So she began to clap along with the legislators, the panjandrums, the high judges, and the diplomats. She derided their applause by slowly striking one little hand against the other. And we who were with her, who were so very frightened for her, she made us laugh.

Last summer a sudden medical crisis first taught me the possibility of losing Sue. The emotion of it dislodged a sonnet, an obscure poem from the detritus of memory, from the days of my teens, of my "hot youth"—when I considered Thomas Wolfe the greatest of novelists and Tchaikovsky the supreme composer. I will grant to the poets among you that this is not in the league of the psalmists or

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the weary preacher of Ecclesiastes whose language you have just been hearing. And it has not the poignance or the bright mischievousness, both deep in the essence of Sueay, which Shakespeare bestowed on Prince Hal in the speech Sue recited in high school (from *King Henry the Fourth,* Part One, I, ii) and which my Aunt Sally Sedgwick has just read to you in tender recall of the girl who once was her drama student. Just the same, I make no apology for what follows:

Oh! Death will find me, long before I tire
Of watching you; and swing me suddenly
Into the shade and loneliness and mire
Of the last land! There, waiting patiently,

One day, I think, I'll feel a cool wind blowing,
See a slow light across the Stygian tide,
And hear the Dead about me stir, unknowing,
And tremble. And I shall know that you have died.

And watch you, a broad-browed and smiling dream,
Pass, light as ever, through the lightless host,
Quietly ponder, start, and sway, and gleam—
Most individual and bewildering ghost!—

And turn, and toss your brown delightful head
Amusedly, among the ancient Dead.

An Englishman wrote that. Rupert Brooke. Perhaps the best known though perhaps not the best of the Georgian poets whose neo-classical and impossibly romantic view of life was wiped out by the First World War—together with the poet himself. Brooke is hard to find nowadays in the anthologies. I had to hunt in order to recover this, and I did so only after considering a pantheon of appropriate greater poets—ranging from Milton through Yeats to Auden, from Rilke to the haiku masters. In all of that I found nothing which struck me with the image and the spirit of my beloved wife as does the couplet on which this youthful sonnet ends.

And turn, and toss your brown delightful head
Amusedly, among the ancient Dead.

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Of you who loved Sue, who loved our Sueay—as friends, cousins, nieces, nephews, sisters, in-laws and step-relatives and ex-relatives by the dozen—who loved her as a mother—and above all to the brave young man who now has lost his mother: of all of you I ask that you remember her out of your private memories. I also ask that sometimes you might please think of her as that most individual and bewildering ghost passing lightly and beyond torment through the last land and tossing her brown delightful head.

—JOHN MARQUAND

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

FICTION

Carola Dibbell has had work appear in *Esquire, MS.* and *The Village Voice.* She has recently completed a novel entitled *The Vulgar Guru and the Mystery of Life.* She lives in New York.

C.W. Gusewelle has had stories published in *The Antioch Review, Transatlantic Review* and *Harper's,* among others. He is the foreign editor of the Kansas City *Star.*

Peter Handke's most recent book, *A Moment of True Feeling,* was published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux this summer. The first chapter is reprinted here.

William S. Wilson lives and teaches in New York City. Ecco Press will publish a book of stories entitled *Why I don't write like Franz Kafka* in September.

INTERVIEW

Thomas LeClair teaches English at the University of Cincinnati. His essays and reviews have appeared in *Contemporary Literature, The New Republic* and the New York *Times.* His interview with Stanley Elkin appeared in issue #66 of *The Paris Review.*

POETRY

Dick Allen is the author of *Regions With No Proper Names* (St. Martin's) and *Anon and Various Time Machine Poems* (Delta).

Paulé Bártón, born in Haiti in 1916, imprisoned there under the regime of President Duvalier, spent the later years of his life in Trinidad-Tobago. He worked mainly as a goatherd. Bártón died in 1974.

David Bergman's books include *The Window, Laments* and *The Journey Begins.* This is his third appearance in *The Paris Review.*

James Bertolino's *The Alleged Conception* was published in 1976 by Granite Publications, and his *New And Selected Poems* is due to be released this fall by the Carnegie-Mellon University Press.

Erica Funkhouser lives in Boston and teaches at local community colleges. Her poems have appeared in *The Little Magazine, Dark Horses, The Andover Review* and *Zeugma.*

Brendan Galvin has published two collections of poems in the Pittsburgh University Poetry Series: *No Time For Good Reasons* (1974) and *The Minutes No One Owns* (1977).

Patricia Goedicke, recently awarded the William Carlos Williams prize by *New Letters*, is a writer-in-residence for the Summer Term at Kalamazoo

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College. Ithaca House will publish her third book, *The Trail That Turns on Itself*, this fall.

Marjorie Hawksworth teaches poetry and creative writing in Santa Barbara. Her poems have appeared in *The Chowder Review, Confrontation* and *The Hiram Poetry Review.*

Galway Kinnell's new revised edition of translations of Francois Villon's work will be published this fall by Houghton-Mifflin.

Joan Moore, born in Kentucky, now lives in Bridgewater, Connecticut. This is her first publication.

Phillip Murray is the author of *Poems After Martial* (Wesleyan). Recent and forthcoming appearances include *Poetry, The Michigan Quarterly, The Andover Review* and *Pearl.*

John Ower teaches English at the University of South Carolina. A volume of his verse, *Legendary Acts*, will be published by the University of Georgia Press this summer.

Deborah Pease lives in New York City. Her work has appeared in the *New Yorker*, and W.W. Norton published *Real Life*, a novel. This is her first published poem.

John Pijewski, who recently won the Grolier Poetry Prize, will teach at Boston University in the Fall.

Vern Rutsala's new book, *The Journey Begins*, was recently published by the University of Georgia Press. Wesleyan University Press will publish a collection entitled *Paragraphs* next year.

David Schloss, a graduate of the University of Iowa Writer's Workshop, currently teaches at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. His work has appeared in *Poetry, The Iowa Review* and *Partisan Review*, among others.

Okhee Stephens, born in Korea, came to New York eight years ago to study voice at Mannes College of Music.

Michael Stephens is the author of *Season at Coole* (Dutton, 1972), *Paragraphs* (Mulch, 1974) and *Still Life* (Kroesen, 1977). He will be on a playwriting fellowship at Yale this fall.

Ricardo de Silviera Lobo Sternberg is currently a Junior Fellow at Harvard. His poems have been published in *American Poetry Review, Ploughshares, Virginia Quarterly Review*, and elsewhere.

Virginia Terris has had work appear in *American Poetry Review, Nation, New Letters*, and elsewhere. *Tracking* was published by the University of Illinios Press in 1976.

François Villon was a French poet of the late Middle Ages, widely celebrated by 19th-century romantic novelists and poets.

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Tamara Watson's work has appeared in *13th Moon*, *Poetry Now*, *The Massachusetts Review* and elsewhere. She lives in New York City.

John C. Witte is a Maine poet whose work has appeared in *Epoch* and *The American Poetry Review*. Other poems are forthcoming in The *New Yorker*.

ART

William Copley is represented in the collections of the Tate Gallery, the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art and numerous public and private collections. He has a show forthcoming in January, 1978, at Brooks Jackson / Alexandre Iolas Gallery in New York.

Deborah Turbeville's fashion photographs have appeared in *Zoom*, the American and French editions of *Vogue* and elsewhere. Sonnabend Gallery had a show of her photographs in Spring, 1977. She lives in Paris.

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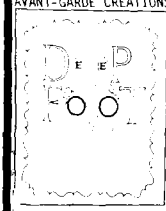

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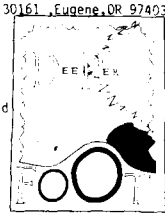

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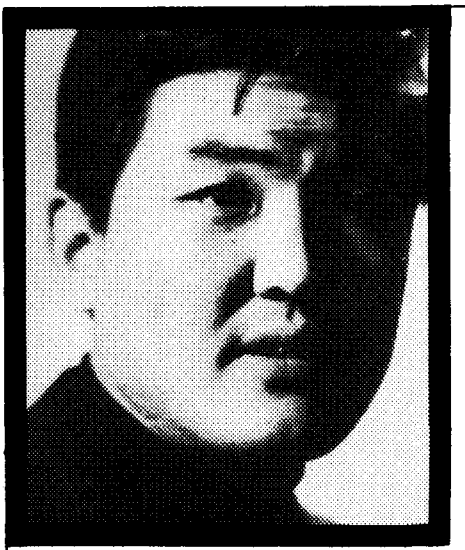

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